Popular Resistance to Zamindari Oppression in Eastern U.P., Northern India, 1920–60

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Abstract

This study examines popular politics in Uttar Pradesh with specific reference to Gorakhpur, Basti and Azamgarh bewtween 1920–60. The focus is on the politicisation of the *kisans*, ordinary men and women who were numerically the largest section of rural society. It is argued that their world views and political aspirations were informed by clearly defined notions of social justice and power relations, themselves based on particular problems stemming from the nature of *julum*, one of its meanings being the tyranny of the zamindars. This thesis makes extensive use of oral sources, utilising social anthropological tools and places greater weight on folk wisdom, local customs and cosmological beliefs. The social construction of gender is important to this study. It is argued that kisans' politics made no fundamental change to the pre-existing system of gender relations, because gender was not the object of protest. It is also argued that their political aspirations remained largely independent of official Congress politics: the kisans were not passive victims, but actively resisted and manipulated elements of *élite* domination by pronouncing their own goals.

Although all kinds of popular associations with the environment, myths, legends and customs were used to mobilise the *kisans*, they realised their political identities not within the framework of the nationalist discourse, but against it. The Congress was forced to espouse the kisans' demand for outright land ownership and promise the abolition of zamindari in its bid to take over office. This study concludes by stating that the historical weight and energy of these popular movements decisively influenced the government and compelled it to adopt a socialist agenda.

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The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

Abbreviations

AICC	All India Congress Committee
CPC	Criminal Proceedure Code
DCC	District Congress Committee
MCC	Mandal Congress Committee
NAI	National Archives of India
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
PAI	Police Abstracts of Intelligence
TCC	Tahsil Congress Committee
UPBECR	United Provinces Banking Enquiry Commission Report
UPPCC	United Provinces Provincial Congress Committee
UPRAR	United Provinces Revenue Administration Report
UPSA	Uttar Pradesh State Archives

Glossary

aandhi storm

abadi a human settlement

abwab fees

achari pandit

adh pau half a pound weight

adh batai half of a share

adhikari authority

akhara gymnasium

amin a revenue clerk

angethi stove

aroii calotropis gigantea

arthi invoking the divine

arhat a credit agency

asami a tenant

bacchiya child

bael aegle marmegos or wood-apple

badiya good

badmaash hooligan

ballams lances

bargad banyan tree, ficus indica

batai division of crop

badzat person of ill repute

begar forced, unpaid labour

bhaita sit

bhang opium

bhusa fodder

bhut ghost

bigha unit of measurement

boli dialect

bedakhli eviction

camina a contemptible person

chabutra raised platform near a dwelling

chak plot of land

chhatak sixteenth part of a seer, two ounces

chittia letter

choti a pigtail

daroga policeman

darshan blessing

dehelia mud cakes

dub cynodon dactylon

farzi not real, false entry

fasli calendar year

ghair kabiz not in possession

ghosana patra a written resolution

hari free provisions

haq right

harwaha ploughman

himsa violence

hukumat administration

huqqa tobacco pipe

huzur master

ilaqa locality

ishtafas notices of resignation

jalim cruel

jamun eugenia jambolona

jatha a large gathering

jaukerai a field of millet

jotedar a cultivator

jhil a lake

karinda bailiff

kusa poa cynosuroides

kutia hut

khajdi string instrument

khapdias mud pots

lathi wooden stick

mahua bassia latifolia

maurausi hereditary occupancy rights

milkiyat inalienable proprietary rights

nakhat lunar asterism

neem azadrica indica

panch five or a group of elders in a village

patta deed or lease of landownership

peepal ficus religiosa

sal shorea robusta

sarkar government

sattu parched grain

sipahi mercenary or regular soldier

thana a police station

tulsi ocymum sanctum

Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Introduction

The broad purpose of this thesis is to examine the subject of popular politics in the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh[1] between 1920 and 1960, with specific reference to Gorakhpur division, that is, the districts of Gorakhpur, Basti and Azamgarh.[2] Essential to my understanding of the "politics of the people"[3] is the notion of *julum*, which the *kisans* (peasants without land ownership rights) described as the tyranny of the zamindari system. In order to encompass the wider understanding of *julum* it is necessary to examine the polarisation of society between the kisans and the zamindars; to enter into the cosmology which influenced the collective experiences of the kisans; to study their interaction with their environment, their local agricultural customs and traditional practices. The social construction of gender is also important to this study: what did it mean to be female or male, and how were social relations constituted in this region with respect to caste, class and religion? Finally, I hope to illustrate how the philosophical underpinnings of popular politics drew as much from the underlying spiritual tradition as from the turmoils arising from the land problem and the struggle for survival.

[1] Later known as Uttar Pradesh and henceforth abbreviated to U.P.

[2] Deoria was carved out of Gorakhpur and declared a separate district in 1946.

[3] The expression used by R. Guha, "On some aspects of the historiography in colonial India", in R. Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, I, (Delhi, 1981), p. 4.

In this study, the emphasis is on the political participation of the kisans, ordinary men and women who were mainly illiterate, low-caste, and belonged to the poorest, but numerically largest, section of rural society.[4] Their world-view and political aspirations were informed by clearly defined notions of social justice and power relations, themselves reflecting the nature of *julum*, one of the meanings of which was the tyranny of the zamindars. The term *julum* was often used by the kisans to describe their condition and referred to the forms of social injustice perpetrated by the powers-that-be on the villagers by the zamindar, *amin, karinda, goonda, daroga, chowkidar* and *patwari* under the influence of the colonial administration. The radical politicisation of kisans which occurred in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, grew, in part, out of the terms and conditions under which they worked. There was a deep distrust of all forms of authority, and there was a consistent refusal on the part of the kisans to take the rulers at their own valuation: rather there was an insistence on seeing them from the perspective of the ruled. This was the view of of the men and women I met in the course of my field-work. Some of them had in the past undergone persecution at the hands of officials on account of their political activities among the kisans; many of them were cultivators who had no *milkiyat* or land ownership rights. They were mostly aged between 70 and 90 years old.[5] Nearly all of them had participated in the organised struggles for these rights, which began in the 1920s, and continued for several decades after Independence.

The U.P. provides a good case study for examining various theoretical problems with regard to popular politics in the subcontinent. It is also the largest

[4]The term *kisan* contains culturally specific connotations which are not conveyed by the term 'peasant'—hence its preferred usage. On account of the frequent recurrence of Indian words such as *kisan, zamindar* and *sabha* they have not been italicised after their first appearance.

[5]See Bibliography for a list of those interviewed.

Figure 0.1.

state in India, predominantly agrarian, and has played an influential role by providing a popular base for the Congress for several decades, and in recent years has decisively reversed that party's political fortunes. My preference was also based on memories associated with an army childhood: the vast terrain, extremes of climate, deep forests, long jeep drives and familiarity with the language. Unlike the more prosperous western districts (with their independent peasant proprietors), eastern U.P. has always been regarded as the most densely populated, backward and poorest region in the province. Moreover, this tract experienced far reaching consequences of colonial rule which did away with the pre-existing nature of landownership: communities of smallholders were replaced by big zamindaris during the late nineteenth-century.[6] Thereafter, most of the land which had been covered with dense forests was cleared, particularly in the terai, and this led to the concentration of huge estates in the trans-Rapti tract. The specially favoured position of the Awadh taluqdar (after the Mutiny), granted him phenomenal status and power in rural society. In sharp contrast, the condition of the kisans in this region was considerably worse than anywhere else in U.P. Without any hope of land ownership and the impossibility of legal redress, they were victimised by zamindari extortion (rack renting and illegal levies) for over three-quarters of a century. It seems impossible to avoid noticing the deep divide in rural society between the zamindars and the kisans: there was such great disparity of power between the dominant class of zamindars and the subordinate kisans that its very arbitrariness contributed to the intensity of the struggles for land rights.

The period 1920–60 was chosen to contrast the nature of popular politics be-

[6]B.H. Baden-Powell, Land Systems in British India, I, (1892; Delhi reprint 1974), p. 441, also cited in Gyanendra Pandey, "Rallying around the cow: Sectarian strife in the Bhojpuri region, c. 1888–1917" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, II, (Delhi, 1983), p. 69.

fore and after the transition to Independence so as to compare and analyse its historical weight and significance. Oral and written sources suggest that the gradual politicisation of the kisans from the 1920s onwards was primarily informed by their persistent engagement in trying to remove *julum*. It has been clearly established that the nationalism of the Congress was substantially different from the aims and aspirations of the kisans. Although the Congress may have been a source of inspiration to them, it remained apprehensive of the kisans and sought to constrain "their overbearing enthusiasm".[7] Instead of concluding this study in 1947, as is normally the case, I have extended this research to illustrate how popular politics continued to remain stubbornly independent of official Congress ideology: indeed, after the transfer of power to the Congress, the kisan agitations acquired a greater ferocity that forced the government to abolish the zamindari system.

There is a serious need to contest and correct the bias towards elitism in Indian historiography. During the last decade, there has been a gravitational shift in the writing of Indian history. This has been generated by a new consciousness which aims to examine not just the politics of subordination and subalternity, "but also the culture informing [such a] condition", to correct the *élite*, institutional bias and challenge the very categories through which the colonial past has been constructed.[8] The main thrust of the arguments is that popular consciousness cannot be regarded as merely an act of ideological appropriation through the influences and initiatives of the *élite* alone. Further, these scholars suggest that there is a need to question and dismantle conventional categories by scrutinising their everyday usage and the contexts in which their complexity becomes

[7]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.
[8]Ranajit Guha, "On some aspects of the historiography", pp. 1–8.

apparent. They analyse "the tension and opposition between what belongs to the central or dominant culture and [what belongs to] the culture of the subordinates by investigating these sets of distinctions and oppositions whose referents shift in spatial and temporal terms".[9] It is thus also an attack on nationalist historiography with its representations of "ideology" particularly of the Indian National Congress,[10] which claims to have bestowed on all social groups a uniform political consciousness with a secular identity: "a sanctioned official history of itself".[11] Further, Kaviraj argues that "it is important to break down the abstraction of the the national movement itself, and of a large [political] formation like the Congress, in order to see the politics that are constantly at play inside historical accounts. Even within a seemingly homogeneous history, it is often essential to ask whose history this is, in the sense *for* whom, rather than the history *of* whom, because there are changes in the telling".[12] It is true that the main thrust of nationalist politics generated a concept of a nation, insisting upon a unity of consciousness. Many leaders believed that, despite all differences, a concept of nation was necessary: at some point the Indian people could come to feel at some level as if they "belonged" to a nation and so needed to put an end to colonial exploitation. However, "united consciousness" could not exist prior

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[10] For example, Bipan Chandra et al, India's Struggle for Independence, 1857–1947 (Delhi, 1989).

[11] Sudipta Kaviraj, "The imaginary institution of India", in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds.), Subaltern Studies, VII, (Delhi, 1992), pp. 1–40.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 4. Also see interesting article by William Beik, "The dilemma of popular history", Past and Present, 141, November 1993, pp. 207–215. He argues that there is nothing wrong with "valorisation". In practice historians valorise leaders, movements, regimes, etc, by studying them with serious attention. If it is valid to decide that the majority of the population merits consideration—and this is the kind of value judgement that historians cannot avoid—then work which brings such persons on the stage and examines their possible actions, motives and influence should be encouraged, "[that is] contributions made by subordinate populations through their work, their suffering or their distinctive forms of expression", *ibid.*, p. 210.

to a process of nationalisation because political expectations varied a great deal: "[There are] differences between what appears to be united action and having a united consciousness: people work together for all sorts of reasons; having exactly the same beliefs is rarely one of them".[13]

Further, at the popular level, there is a repeated danger in homogenising nationalism. This encourages the serious theoretical flaw of attributing to the Congress a monolithic bourgeois nationalism and fails to explore its connotatations to different social strata. For example, by labelling various kinds of political participation as Congress movements or primarily "nationalist", the aspirations and separate ideological contributions of the majority of the people as they attempted to negotiate, reconstruct and re-evaluate "a common destiny" are subsumed or misrepresented. In this study I have attempted to qualify the meaning of the Congress by reference to popular politics and popular understanding of it. Although the symbols used may have been inspired by the Congress, it connoted different meanings to different sections of the population. For instance, often the alternative power basis set up by its grass roots organisation encouraged many kisans to believe that the party aimed to establish *kisan raj*: nothing could have been further from the truth. Nevertheless, at the national level, the sacrosanct image of the Congress was firmly established on account of its political engagement with anti-imperialism and its struggle against colonial rule. Although there were schisms within the party during the 1930s and the formation of the Congress Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc as separate parties, they and even the Communists chose to remain subordinate and work with the Congress in the final years before Independence. This affected the political fortunes of popular politics and

[13]Personal communication from Sarah F. Green, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge.

the nature of agrarian reform.

Whilst analysing the relevant historiographical contributions in the light of this thesis, elements which relate (that is, are both exclusive and confined) to urban culture have been excluded. This is a study of the culture and politics of the kisans of the three districts of eastern U.P., officially classified as Gorakhpur division. It aims to be an analysis of the politics of these kisans, whose ideas, norms, values and expectations were conditioned by their experiences and understanding of exploitation. Thus, it is an in-depth examination of a rural society from the 1920s, when the movements against zamindari *julum* began, covers the transition to Independence, and the passing of the Zamindari Abolition Act, and its consequences, up to 1960.

There have been many valuable studies on the peasant movements in U.P. The use of the term "peasant" is often qualified and reference is made to the differentiation theses originally postulated by Lenin and later developed in the context of China by Mao Zedong. The purpose of these arguments was to identify the political orientation of classes in a revolutionary context. Which strata of peasant society were most prone to revolt or be able to provide leadership? What was the social reach of this participation? The Lenin-Mao theses emphasised the need to refine the structure of rural society and not treat the peasantry as a single homogeneous stratum. Hamza Alavi's, "middle peasant thesis" was a result of such an enquiry and Jacques Pouchepadass supported the "dominant peasant thesis" in his study of Bihar to counter Alavi's argument that the middle peasants were the most revolutionary stratum, providing both the leadership and the ideological framework.[14] The stratification of lower ranks in agrarian society

[14]Hamza Alavi, "Peasants and Revolution" in Kathleen Gough and Hari Sharma (eds.),

is possible in areas where independent peasant proprietorship was in existence. Most of the land in the trans-Rapti was held by the zamindars, and cultivated by tenants-at-will. Thus in this area the idea of attributing political participation to rich and middle peasants needs to be seriously qualified.

Nevertheless, these scholarly contributions have been useful in cultivating a greater sensitivity in the analysis of agrarian structure in rural India. Further, the role of the Congress with regard to "the peasant question" has also come under serious examination. Two such studies which were useful in bringing the peasant into history are by Kapil Kumar and Majid Siddiqi. They focused on the peasant movements in Awadh, and the districts of Pratapgarh and Faizabad. Kapil Kumar has unearthed valuable material on the influential kisan leader Baba Ramchandra and his role in the peasant movements.[15] Siddiqi's work highlights the *Eka* movements.[16] Both are attempts to restore the voice of the kisans and suggest that there were two distinct strains within the national movement which influenced each other. The peasant movements were revolutionary movements and these historians show how the Congress was conservative and restrained radicalism among the peasants. Another sociologist, D.N. Dhanagare, distinguishes between Gandhian-led movements such as Champaran, Bardoli and Kheda and the peasant movements in U.P.[17] He suggests that these Gandhian led movements, composed mainly of prosperous middle peasants, were deliberately

Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, (New York, 1973.), pp. 291–337, Jacques Pouchepadass, "Peasant classes in the twentieth century: Agrarian movements in India", in Eric Hobsbawm et al (eds.), Peasants in History: Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner (Calcutta, 1980), p. 147.

[15]Kapil Kumar, Peasants in Revolt: Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh (1886–1922), (Delhi, 1982).

[16]Majid Siddiqi, Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces, 1918–22, (Delhi, 1978).

[17]D.N. Dhanagare, Peasant Movements in India, 1920–50 (Delhi, 1983).

selected to obfuscate the issue of class struggle. In sharp contrast, the peasant movements in the U.P were far more revolutionary and often embarrassed the Congress. Although these historians usefully highlighted the role of the peasants in Indian history, their arguments are limited by their adherence to a certain theoretical strain in orthodox Marxism; their analysis concentrates on class struggle and tends to disregard the particularities of culture, religion and custom that added a vital dimension to popular politics in U.P.

A recent work by Vinita Damodaran deals with the related situation in neighbouring Bihar, and is a further investigation of important themes raised by the scholars mentioned above.[18] Damodaran seeks to examine "popular protest" and highlights the role of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, showing how they failed to live up to the expectations of "the people", a term she frequently uses but does not define. By separating the experience of the 1920s from the 1930s, and concentrating exclusively on the eleven years, 1935 to 1946, she overlooks certain vital developments at the popular level that were later appropriated by Congress politics. Powerful kisan leaders like Swami Sahajanand are given merely a passing mention. Rahul Sankritayan, an important local kisan leader who was actively involved in the politics of Bihar after 1937, is not even mentioned. The dimensions of popular protest, clearly not the object of her study remain unanalysed. Damodaran elsewhere mentions *azad dastas*, which were popular local organisations particularly active during 1942, but fails to investigate how they came about, or explore the significance of their politics.[19]

Another group of historians have, by contrast with, this peasant emphasis,

[18]Vinita Damodaran, Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar 1935–46, (Delhi, 1992).

[19]Vinita Damodaran,"Azad dastas and dacoit gangs 1942-44", Modern Asian Studies, 26, 3, 1992, pp. 417–50.

tended to understand the rural world in terms of the zamindar and the colonial *élite*. Some scholars, such as Thomas Metcalf, Peter Musgrave and Peter Reeves, have examined the nature of landholding, its legal aspects and social change from the viewpoint of the taluqdars or zamindars. Despite evidence to the contrary, they hesitate to agree with the view that the landlords possessed almost uninhibited and extensive privileges which led to continuous friction with the tenants. Instead they argue that the complexity of the power structure meant that it was mainly abused by lower echelons of the administration in society such as the *patwari*. For instance, Musgrave emphasises that due to the scattered nature of the zamindar's holdings, shared ownership of villages (*pattidari* tenure), and role of grasping revenue officials such as the *amins*, the zamindar's powers considerably reduced.[20] So he is critical of the British policy makers or the "Oudh men" and notes that "the great landed estate was a flawed and imperfect system of rural control".[21] Thus he refutes the idea of landlords being able to exercise *imperium in imperio* power. Thomas Metcalf's study of the taluqdari system in Oudh (as he prefers to call it) seeks to redress the balance in analysing the tensions in land relations.[22] His study focuses on the security of tenure enjoyed by the taluqdars and the patronage they both commanded and received in return for loyalty to the Crown. He notes that the British did little to shake the fabric of rural society and argues the social upheaval which resulted from enforced land sales cannot be attributed to the working of British land policy;[23] the traditional structures of production and social relationships in the village largely continued

[20]Peter Musgrave, "An Indian Rural Society; Aspects of the Structure of Rural Society in the United Provinces, 1860–1920", (unpublished PhD thesis), Cambridge, 1976.

[21]Peter Musgrave, "A Reply", Modern Asian Studies, 17,1, 1983, pp. 56–7.

[22]Thomas R. Metcalf, Land, Landlords and the British Raj: Northern India in the Nineteenth Century, (Berkeley, 1979).

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 379.

as before.[24] However, he notes that bureaucratisation was introduced by colonial rule, whereby power was ultimately wielded by the patronage networks of under-proprietors and estate servants. To Metcalf, "the great landlord was as anamolous a figure as the British district officer".[25] Thus his main argument does not differ very much from Musgrave in stressing the relative remoteness and limited power of the zamindari *élite*. Both fail, significantly, to examine the nature of agricultural production, an important source of taluqdari income and prestige.

Another important study of the zamindars has been done by Peter Reeves.[26] In his analysis of the zamindari system in U.P., he examines the politics of the *élites*, and the influence of policy makers, the "Oudh men", from the 1920s until its abolition. This study partially illuminates the administrative and political manoeuvres made by the zamindars to retain power during the transition from British raj to Congress raj. Those "who were governed" are not seen as having a political presence of their own, and Reeves overlooks the profound impact of the kisan movements that were able to effect zamindari abolition, (as Arvind N. Das's study of Bihar between 1947–78 has clearly shown).[27] Das illustrates how zamindari abolition was not effected by an "*élite*-sponsored land reform", but by pressure from below. The kisans did not just challenge the *status quo*, but also exerted a decisive influence on the turn of events and the shaping of policies in the decades following Independence, as the later chapters of this thesis show. The workings of the zamindari system were intimately tied to the fortunes of the

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 383.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Peter D. Reeves, Landlords and Government in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of their Relations until Zamindari Abolition, 1920–1950 (Delhi, 1991).

[27] Arvind N. Das, "Agrarian change from above and below: Bihar 1947–78" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, II, pp. 180–227.

cultivators through coercive and extractive mechanisms. And yet none of these studies addresses these critical issues. They also do not take into account the economic structures generated by colonial rule such as the transformation of zamindari privileges and the appropriation of vital natural resources leading to the acute scarcity of land. Further, they do not adequately examine the consequent agrarian relations, and are dismissive of the the kisans who are lumped together as ignorant cultivators, lacking discernment and "habituated to subordination".[28]

In contrast to these historians, the studies by Shahid Amin and Gyanendra Pandey are particularly relevant to issues examined in this thesis as they concern popular politics in eastern U.P. and the province as a whole. Amin's work is an important contribution because it focuses on the nature of agricultural production (rather than rely upon the official classification of tenures), and illustrates how petty peasant production adversely affected the lives of the kisans. In his study of sugarcane farming, Amin has shown how the nature of small-holdings (less than half an acre in many cases), multiple cropping and poor fertility of the soil generated a very low cash income and a perpetual state of indebtedness: the kisans could barely reach a subsistence level.[29] The cultivation of sugarcane held a very special meaning in their lives and not only because of its value as a cash crop: *gur* (unrefined sugar) was the only form of nourishment and sustenance for many households, until the coming of the sugar mills, introduced new forms of oppression and exploitation.

Amin's writings rely heavily on the political economy of this region (economics, law and politics) in the understanding of popular protest, though issues

[28]Metcalf, Land, Landlords, p. 378.

[29]Shahid Amin, Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India, (Delhi, 1984).

such as petty peasant production in sugarcane farming, attitudes to Gandhi, and the trial at Chauri Chaura. He has also discussed the role of rumour and shown in fascinating detail how popular attitudes to Gandhi clashed with the basic premises of Gandhism and were often at variance with the local leadership. In doing so, Amin questions the power that Gandhi actually commanded over that leadership, let alone the rank and file, who in their turn imposed their own aspirations on the framework of events.[30] Amin's article illustrates the need to take into account magic, popular religion and even thaumaturgical belief systems because their powerful influence in political expression had not been fully addressed.[31]

From a somewhat different perspective, Gyanendra Pandey has examined the intensity of the movement in U.P. and its mass character.[32] He analyses the growth of the Congress, its leadership and organisation—the mobilisation from the Congress and Khilafat platforms, and states that the earliest voluntary organisations were the Seva Samitis.[33] He agrees with Bayly, and states that in Agra, Allahabad, Azamgarh and Rae Bareli, small zamindars and *pattidars* formed the organisational basis of the movement in the 1920s and 1930s.[34] However, my evidence for Basti and Gorakhpur suggests that this was not always so.[35] Although small zamindars and *pattidars* may have been at the helm of affairs in the District

[30]Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur district, eastern U.P. 1921–2", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, III, (Delhi, 1984), pp. 1–61.

[31]*Ibid.* He quotes an observation on this region by P.C. Joshi, "Religion and magic permeated every sphere and occasion of life", p. 7.

[32]Gyanendra Pandey, The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh., 1926–34: A Study in Imperfect Mobilisation, (Delhi, 1978), pp. 51–2.

[33]*Ibid.*, p. 34.

[34]C.A. Bayly, The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad 1880–1920 (Oxford, 1975), pp. 255–8.

[35]Many leaders in Azamgarh, for instance, were influenced by the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India (hereafter RSPI), and undoubtedly Jai Bahadur Singh, Jharkande Rai and Ramanand Gupta belonged to the landed gentry.

Congress Committees and the United Provinces Provincal Congress Committee, they were not responsible for the growth and organisation of the movement in the 1920s and the 1930s. They provided moral support for the Congress but they also preached the Constructive Programme, that is national education, spinning and weaving of *khaddar*, and so forth. Pandey himself admits that *khaddar* and *swadeshi* did not have much of an impact on the rural classes.[36] The ground-work for agitation was laid by the *mandal* (bloc of villages) *netas* (leaders), and *kartas* (workers) mostly belonging to the lower-castes, such as Puranmasi Chamar and Tirloki Pasi, who were responsible for sustaining the basic strength of the Congress in the villages and *tahsils*; they were kisans (not pattidars or petty zamindars) who were either landless or held about half an acre or more of land which they cultivated. One kisan activist, Balbadrinath noted that was why the agitations for *batai* continued long after the movement was called off by Gandhi.[37]

Both Amin and Pandey have illustrated through valuable research how popular consciousness had its own inner life, and how official history was often at odds with popular perceptions and activities. Pandey appears to be chiefly interested in examining the social and religious content and the changing identities of popular mobilisation, as is shown in his studies of the kisan movements in Awadh from the 1920s, "imperfect" mobilisation by the Congress, the Gaurakshini sabhas, and even in the diary of a weaver. He queries the construction of "communalism" in colonial India, looking beyond what has for so long been characterised as sectarian or communal strife.[38] These attitudes fostered an incorrect understanding of Indian society as factious and suggested that loyalties of caste, tribe and religion

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

[37] Personal communication from Balbadrinath.

[38] Gyanendra Pandey, The Construction Of Communalism in Colonial North India (Delhi, 1990).

prevailed over party politics in the European and American sense.[39] Such arguments are still present in the writings of historians such as Bayly, who argues that it is necessary to get rid of the Whiggish notion of political mobilisation for India as pre-colonial caste loyalties inspired by a "rural Hindu populism" primarily inspired people to unite during the colonial period.[40] To him, caste solidarities and religious fervour with linkages from the landed estates to the village activated support for the Congress. There are obviously serious empirical errors in seeking to establish an essential continuity between pre-colonial and colonial social, political and economic formations. Also it is more fruitful to explore the formative influences which may have led to the establishment of these caste solidarities as Pandey has done. He shows that in the formation of caste sabhas, and similar organisations, many participants such as the Chamars seized the opportunity to join the movements for self-reform, independently deciding not to engage in the traditional occupation of tanning hides and skins. This was very much in keeping with the spirit of the times—the influence of the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Gandhi panchayats.[41] They were not alone: Nais, Dhobis, Telis and other lower castes met in various *biradaris* (extended caste families) and decided not to partake of meat, fish or liquor and other intoxicants. They also pledged to punish all members who disobeyed the rules in the interests of a particular form

[39]See critique by David Hardiman, "The Indian 'faction': A political theory examined" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, I, pp. 198–231. Also Rudrangshu Mukherjee, "The Kanpur massacres of 1857: A Reply", Past and Present, 142, February 1994, pp. 178–189, notes that "a common assumption of British officials in the nineteenth-century was that Indians were incapable of united action because of caste and religious divisions. And it was this belief that made them often overlook a number of things: aspects of popular and united action...", *ibid.*, p. 188.

[40]C.A. Bayly, "Rural conflict and the roots of Indian nationalism: Allahabad district since 1800", in P. Brass and F. Robinson (eds.), Indian National Congress and Indian Society, 1885–1985: Ideology, Structure and Political Dominance (Delhi, 1987), pp. 228–231.

[41]Pandey, "Rallying around the cow", pp. 212–14.

of *dharma prachar* (moral consciousness) which was rooted in the culture of the Bhojpuri-speaking belt. Such studies insist upon greater definitional and systematic rigour by questioning the assumptions and generalisations about caste and religious identities and their political signficance.

These arguments are particularly relevant as there has lately been an explosion of "community" studies on India. Many of these studies focus on two religious communities—the Hindus and the Muslims. The term "community" is borrowed from nineteenth-century European theory but its application to Indian society is not without added connotations.[42] Many Subaltern historians including Pandey have questioned its careless usage.[43] Pandey argues that communalism was not the only or indeed necessarily, the outcome of complex pattern of developments. Rather he suggests that the boundaries of a "community" shift all the time, and it is wrong to argue that a particular context would activate a particular solidarity. There is a need to ask: Who has defined them as a community? What were the particular concerns and interests behind such a classification? And, most importantly, how closely did the people who supposedly belonged to the community identify with it? After all, a community exists only where people believe there is one; a sense of community is situational and negotiable, defining only one facet of an individual's identity.

The present study differs from Amin's and Pandey's approach to popular politics. It largely focuses on local level politics—village-level activites as opposed to the district or province. Amin and Pandey have dealt with economy, society and politics at the supra-local level and delineated certain patterns and political

[42]Sandria Freitag, Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India, (Berkeley, 1989).
[43]Pandey, The Construction of Communalism

alignments. However at the local level, correlated trends could not always be found. Also it is important to note that in the case of both these historians, the study of gender has not been located in the context of popular politics. However, they have pioneered a number of areas of importance, which are crucial to the making of subaltern history and furthering the understanding of popular politics and this study is accordingly indebted to them.

The Subaltern school of history is still in its infancy and does not deserve to be strangled at birth. Rather it deserves encouragement for democratising Indian historiography and enriching historical method by utilising tools from other disciplines, notably social anthropology. A recent article criticising Subaltern history for not paying attention to internal patterns of domination within subaltern societies, such as hierarchies of gender, age, religion, status and "the difficult problem of caste" is not altogether justified.[44] It is an incorrect understanding to state that these historians are not sensitive to the wider context of class, state or colonial institutions within which these small scale communities were situated.[45] In fact, it is precisely these terms of references which they are seeking to define and refine in the context of many kinds of dominating and subordinating relationships. Also the study of "small scale communities" can allow for greater ethnographic accuracy; it also fulfils the basic demands of research of this kind by using local sources and respecting the oral tradition. Note for instance in the same article the statement that "[what is] striking about many Indian regional cultures is the extraordinary range of classifications they possess".[46] Such crit-

[44]Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook,"Histories in transition: Approaches to the study of colonialism and culture in India",History Workshop, 32, Autumn 1991, p. 117. Also see Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Recovering the subject Subaltern studies and the histories of resistance in colonial South Asia", Modern Asian Studies, 22, 1, 1988, pp. 189–224.

[45]*Ibid.*, also C.A. Bayly,"Rural conflict and the roots of Indian nationalism", p. 221.

[46]O'Hanlon and Washbrook, "Histories in transition", p. 122.

ics also tend to accept a paradigm in which Indian classifications are peculiarly marked by implied relation to other cultures. In contrast, as historians of popular culture, Subaltern historians are also interested in questioning the validity and creation of colonial stereotypes and classifications which still weigh heavily on the perceptions of, and writings on, the subcontinent. They are attempting to do so by "widening the subject matter of history and opening up whole areas of human experiences which are interwoven in the fabric of society".[47]

Further, it is difficult to agree with the proposition directed against subaltern scholars that isolating moments of rebellion creates the danger of the narrative being cut off from the set of social relations within that particular society, making it difficult to identify resistance in any meaningful way. Rather, such episodes bring to the surface existing tensions and underlying conflicts which reflect the abyss between *élite* and subaltern experiences. It is interesting to observe that those who criticise this school and argue for "a rounded history" are themselves preoccupied with *élite* politics and do not give due weight to the agencies of exploitation within society which affect the nature of class, gender and other interactions at the popular and indeed also the *élite* level.[48]

The understanding of popular politics necessitates the extensive use of oral sources and social anthropological investigations. There has been a growing concern to combine the use of oral history with archival sources, particularly in the writings of historians such as David Hardiman, Shahid Amin, and quite recently, Ajay Skaria.[49] They have analysed the inherent tensions between official and

[47]Keith Thomas, "History and Anthropology", Past and Present, 24, 1963, pp. 3–24.

[48]Christopher Bayly, "Rallying around the Subaltern", Journal of Peasant Studies, 16, 1, 1988, p. 115.

[49]David Hardiman. The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India, (Delhi, 1987), Shahid Amin, Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992 (Delhi, 1995), and A. Skaria, "A Forest Polity in Western India: the Dangs: 1800–1920s", (unpublished PhD

indigenous perceptions, and distinctly advocate the incorporation of (the much neglected) oral history into mainstream historiography, particularly with reference to the colonial discourse of power in the subcontinent and its ramifications.

This thesis also emerges from a series of "long conversations with voices on the ground".[50] The metaphor of voice, especially silenced voices and marginalised voices, is central to many familiar political discussions. It is all too easy a solution to let all available voices speak because this ignores the power of interested, dominant voices—"voices from above"—in shutting out other less articulate, less authoritative voices.

A note on method: The written tradition

It is standard practice in historical research to stress the use of primary source material such as officially published administrative documents, newspapers, the writings and largely unpublished correspondence of men in power. This places emphasis on written sources as largely embodying objective truth. In analysing any aspect of rural society, however, it is vital to work from the spoken tradition of the people and their own forms of self expression; by its very nature popular culture is unwritten. One work to pioneer such an analysis was that of David Hardiman's study of nationalism and the Kheda satyagraha in Gujerat.[51] He notes that while government records have a wealth of information on nationalism, there is nothing on the religiosity and propitiation cults of people (such as

thesis), Cambridge, 1992.

[50]Stephen Gudeman and Alberto Rivera, Conversations in Colombia: The Domestic Economy in Life and Text, (Cambridge, 1989), p. 3.

[51]David Hardiman, Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District 1917–1934, (Delhi, 1981).

the Adivasis) which profoundly affected their state of consciousness and informed, and still informs, popular politics.[52] One can note by contrast, the overwhelming stress on written documentation by another historian, Rosalind O'Hanlon, who has worked on low-caste protest. She observes, "It is difficult to document popular political or ideological activity in societies where the great majority of the population lacks even the most basic skills of literacy, and low castes are no exception to this".[53]

Official sources such as written or published materials cannot be overlooked. However, relying upon official documents can be a misleading exercise. Such sources are inclined to produce, rather than gather or reflect upon, knowledge about the past. These "master narratives" tend to be influenced by a form of legalism, which treats every practice as an act of execution: all relationships (between humans or with things) are subjected to precise and strict prescriptions. One can almost imagine the stiff upper-lipped, usually Oxbridge, bureaucrat, imbued with Social Darwinism, sitting down at his (it was always a he) writing table on a hot day, having at his disposal reams of information which had been collected, classified and codified for the administrative requirements of the empire. In such documents "the natives" are normally regarded as scarcely more than things, unchanging objects whose history and society are to be comprehended through western categories; the natives are identifiable, capable of being classified as separate biological and social entities.[54] Each set of documents could be viewed as a different kind of banality, by which the natives were made into subjects by the

[52]Hardiman, The Coming of the Devi, p. 6.

[53]Rosalind O'Hanlon, Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India, (Cambridge, 1985), p. 1.

[54]For example, an influential classificatory and anthropometric study on U.P. was W.C. Crooke, The Tribes and Castes of The North-Western Provinces and Oudh, vols. I–IV, (Calcutta, 1896).

wider process of institutionalisation. These evaluations rested on western criteria: indigenous cosmologies and distinctions were almost entirely disregarded. For instance, the environment was not perceived as ontologically part of the people who nourished and drew sustenance from it; it was seen as having an agency of its own, limiting and constraining human activity.[55]

The environment was "a protagonist to be attacked, tamed and worked upon", the purpose being to maximise its output by employing "the language of predation and exploitation"; to standardise not only forms of administration, language and education but also the manner in which the natives should farm and eat, setting them apart in the interests of order, rationality, standardisation and profit.[56] It is not surprising, too, that there was also a colonial view of the "body".[57] Further it brought about the bitter contests between native conscience and Western

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p. 22, footnote 55 and p. 46, footnote 8 *insert*
Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin, "Cultural understandings of the environment" *in* Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin (eds.) Bush Base: Forest Farm; Culture, Environment and Development, (London, 1992), p. 32.

Arguably, writing was crucial for the administrators both before and after Independence. They controlled this output of knowledge and entrusted most of their

[55]Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin (eds.), Bush Base: Forest Farm; Culture, Environment and Development, (London, 1992.), p. 32.

[56]*Ibid.*, p. 27.

[57]David Arnold, "Touching the body: Perspectives on the Indian plague 1896–1900", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, V, (Delhi, 1987), pp. 55–90, illustrates western medical practice by using the metaphor of the human body which was divested of its "sacred territory" and given a profane (as the locals saw it) identity.

[58]John and Jean Comaroff, Ethnography and the Historical Imagination (Berkeley, 1991), p. 235, argue that this influence was pervasive, seeking as it did to achieve the colonisation of the conscience: the mental enslavement of a subject people.

collective memory to written records, creating their own version of social reality by dominating and repressing other versions. The official truth was "a collective work of euphemisation", a process by which a group teaches itself and masters its own truth.[59] It binds itself together by tacitly defining the limits of the thinkable and the unthinkable and thereby demonstrates its power.

By contrast, I have benefited from official documentation not meant for publication such as village crime notebooks, police intelligence abstracts, court records and land revenue papers. These contain very valuable information on popular political activity (and the law) if used with discernment. For instance, the police intelligence abstracts are relatively less distorted by manipulation to conform to existing official views. This may have been possible because they were not intended for publication, although they naturally represent aspects of the official structures and are concerned with the practical antcipation and suppression of revolt. Village crime notebooks reveal how even the ordinary everyday activities of the kisans were closely monitored by the district administration. These "confidential" reports are informed by first-hand accounts of political activity occurring in villages and *tahsils* without attempting to dilute its form and content; those recruited to perform such tasks were familiar with the language and metaphors employed by the kisans. The provincial fortnightly reports were dependent on this information, but served more to reassure the government that the situation was under control and that there was no need to panic.

The main political view expressed was that an essentially placid peasantry was being stirred up by a malevolent and subversive "Congress" which had no business to be there. Similarly, while court records may reflect corrupt evidence

[59]Pierre Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice (Cambridge, 1992), p. 41.

and unjust verdicts, their interest in recording facts leading up to the events provides relatively reliable source material for the historian. In closely examining these texts, it is clear that the official practice was to avoid "[any] political foregrounding of events": rather, all forms of political dissent were labelled as acts of treason or dismissed as seditious, thus criminalising their content.[60]

The primary sources I have consulted cover the period 1920–60 (except for colonial documents which end in 1947), and are listed in the Bibliography. In addition to the published and unpublished official sources, and the writings of "men-in-power" in U.P., I have also consulted newspapers such as the *Aaj*, *Abhuydaya*, Leader and the Pioneer. Particular emphasis has been laid on the documents and writings of Congress bodies such as the All-India Congress Committee, the United Provinces Provincial Congress Committee, the proceedings of the United Provinces Legislative Council and the United Provinces Legislative Assembly and the writings of important kisan leaders such as Swami Sahajanand, Rahul Sankritayan, Shibbanlal Saxena and Prakash Chandra Pandey. Together these sources have proved useful in constructing the politics of the Congress, and examining the rifts in its infrastructure, though it should be noted that the Congress in fact represented different things to different sections of the population. I also met and spoke with about ninety *kartas* (volunteers) and *netas* (leaders). Some of them did not wish to be named, and thus promises of anonymity prevent me from mentioning all their names.[61]

Although no sharp distinctions can be drawn between *kartas* and *netas*, the former were the volunteers who were vital to mobilising and organising the move-

[60]Shahid Amin, "Approver's testimony, judicial discourse: The case of Chauri Chaura", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, V, (Delhi, 1987), pp. 166–202.

[61]In my footnotes I use the terms interview to refer to verbal communication and personal communication to refer to written testimonies.

ments against *julum*. The *netas* were usually former *kartas*, and often belonged to an older generation. They provided the real stimulus in my research and expressed a distinctly alternative perspective by illustrating the experiences of ordinary men and women in their struggles against *julum*, thereby helping to define the nature and significance of popular politics. Whilst in the field, I was asked by my social informants to include the rest of the eastern belt. They named the districts of Ballia, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Gonda, Bahraich and Banaras and repeatedly emphasised the *"bhaavanaatmik"* or deeply shared emotional and political experience of the whole region, which required to be incorporated in this study.[62] However this would have meant another year in the field and a much more extensive survey, which both academic and financial constraints prevented me from undertaking. Nevertheless, I respect their views, and this research could be regarded as part of a larger study.

Unearthing a society's memory reveals the hierarchy of power relations. It is also crucial for understanding political legitimation in the control and ownership of information.[63] For instance, official sources tended to use knowledge of the past in a direct and active way because its political behaviour and decisions were frequently based on judgements of the past, especially the recent past as conducted by their police and administration. For a start, the colonisers sought to enlist men with the right sort of pedigree, sifted from predetermined social groups.[64] Many of these acts were promulgated for the registration, the surveillance and the control of "those destined by the usages of caste to commit

[62]See map on page 26.

[63]Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 18–19.

[64]David Arnold, "Bureaucratic recruitment and subordination in colonial India: The Madras constabulary 1859–1947", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, IV, (Delhi, 1985), pp. 1–53.

Eastern Uttar Pradesh

Figure 0.2

crime".[65] It is important to bear in mind that what such writing preserves is not the memory of things but of words.[66] So subjective meanings, the meanings of the participants themselves, were often overridden or misrepresented: administrative texts reproduce and reinforce the structures and practices of official bureaucratic, history.[67]

Another major failing of official sources is their disregard of popular changes in vernacular usage. This can be illustrated by looking at the official glossary of native terms. For instance, Amin notes that the popular adoption of English words by the kisans like *tisan* for station, *bampulis* for bamboo place, *gang* for gang, concepts which were very much part of rural life during the 1870s, have not even been mentioned.[68] The glossary by Crooke also placed greater emphasis on the production process and neglected exchange relations, masking important influences in rural society: for example, the crucial role of moneylenders or *khandsaris* in sugarcane production does not receive a mention. Thus, such evidence is not only partial, but often suffers from a tendency to attribute an all-powerful social role to its own established norms, ideas and practices. Nevertheless, the official paradigm is the legal definition of acceptable behaviour, hence the researcher must take it into account, since the perceptions and opinions of the "men-in-power" played a significant part in the representation of various conflicts.

These kinds of officially written documents are also limited in what they can communicate about life and survival in the world from the kisans' perspective. It

[65]Anand A. Yang, "Dangerous castes and tribes: The Criminal Tribes Act and the Maghaiya Doms of north-east India", in Anand A. Yang (ed.), Crime And Criminality In British India, (Phoenix, 1985), p. 108.

[66]James Fentress and Chris Wickham, Social Memory, (London, 1992), p. 16.

[67]Gyanendra Pandey, "Encounters and calamities: The history of a north Indian qasba in the nineteenth century", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, III, pp. 231–270.

[68]William Crooke, A Glossary of North Indian Peasant Life, edited with introduction, notes and appendices by Shahid Amin, (Delhi, 1989).

seems unavoidable to recognise a distinction between two basic types of knowing, namely knowledge and wisdom, information and understanding. They believed that although knowledge without wisdom was adequate for the powerful, wisdom was essential to the survival of those who were subordinate/subaltern. It is no wonder that most of the kisans I met ridiculed officials as "educated fools" on the grounds that they had "book learning" but no "mother wit".[69] To come to grips with popular politics, one needs to distinguish between official knowledge and popular wisdom and to make full use of experience, personal testimonies and life-in-the-field, as the cutting edge that divides them.

Gender and politics

Most of these official documents rarely saw the need to acknowledge women or their existence. By "essentialising fictions", about Hinduism and Hindu tradition, the officials created their own gendered idioms.[70] The study of gender is important to our enquiry. In western thought women's participation in reproduction and nurturing are fetishised with negative value and emphasis is given to the opposition between the male and female symbol systems and economics. So what is also being questioned are certain theoretical concepts in western history that legitimate the assumption of what "history is". It is necessary to take into account other aspects as well, of "comingling and complementarity", to seek to

[69]This was a common sentiment: some of the kisans said that the officials saw them almost entirely from the Bench, and worried about big things, when it was the little things that needed immediate attention.

[70]Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Issues of widowhood: Gender, discourse and resistance in colonial western India", paper presented at the BASAS conference, University of Sussex, September 1987.

understand the prevailing logic of female and male interaction.[71]

It is also implicit in this argument that there is no universal or unitary sociological category of woman and man.[72] Although women in general share certain experiences and difficulties, these similarities need to be specified in each case and not assumed: there are differences in the symbolic valuation given to gender. I am also arguing that it is a mistake to regard gender as a static category rather than as a performance or process. It is a process of living and gender differences do not automatically imply gender inequality.[73] So it is necessary to look not just "at what men and women do" but also how they are socially constructed. Whilst analysing the gendered nature of politics, I indicate that gender was not crucial to the way popular politics worked here: rather politics took on the shape of the gender relations already there.

In this study, gender has been treated as "a category of persons, artifacts, events, and sequences which draws upon sexual imagery" and in which the distinctiveness of male and female characteristics make concrete people's ideas about the nature of social relationships.[74] The study of gender as a category used to define divisions and differences between women and men is gender identity but could also apply to the idea of an object or an action. There is also a distinction between gender inequality and gender identity. Gender identity implies the variations in the way gender is socially constructed: it involves either looking at how gender is culturally or symbolically constructed, the meaning of gender in different contexts and how economic/social structures incorporate gender distinctions

[71]Annette Weiner, Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange, (Austin, 1976), p. 3.

[72]Henrietta Moore, Feminism and Anthropology, (Cambridge 1988).

[73]Personal communication from Sarah F. Green.

[74]Marilyn Strathern, Gender in The Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society, (Cambridge, 1988), p. ix.

and organise the roles and position of men and women.

The theoretical underpinnings of this research recognises that gender cannot be a separate issue because it fundamentally involves all matters concerning both men and women. Men and women live together in a society which constitutes a single dominating system of values and both are dependent on the other for access to productive resources. They share the same culture and the same conceptual categories, although their position in those categories vary according to age, occupational status, caste and locality. It is thus necessary to conceptualise, measure, evaluate and document aspects of both women's and men's productive and reproductive roles and the ways in which these may interact and affect each other.

Until the last decade, there was a tendency in feminist writing to emphasise universalism, that is, being a woman meant that there were distinct experiences common to all women. Thus it claimed that the nature of gender inequality was common to all cultures, despite enormous variations in gender relations and representations of gender differences. Strathern argues there is a need to guard against "not just from the particular values that western gender imagery puts on this or that activity but also underlying assumptions about the nature of society, and how that nature is made an object of knowledge".[75] Thus the stress on commonality of women's experiences can lead to ethnocentrism in feminist writings and another kind of cultural imperialism. Western culture is based on particular ideas about the role of economic, political and individual inequalities in culture. Women may be identified by the domestic sphere and men by the public/economic sphere, their relative values are thus compared: women are denied

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

access to public that is, the social and economic spheres, which are controlled by men. Despite conscious attempts to avoid reductionism, the "the universal woman" argument tends to mask other forces in society which created inequality.

Thus this type of stereotyping led to a kind of shortsightedness in data collection because the construction of gender was often influenced by, and represented within, the logic of western politics. This is not to suggest the exploitation of women in India does not exist. On the contrary, elements of gender construction as thought to operate in the west were found to be fundamentally different in other cultures. However, these views have not been incorported in the study of gender in India. For instance, Sharma argues that women's effective exclusion from inheritance of land was the basis for their dependence on men.[76] Aggarwal favours the study of "ideology and the material basis" of gender in examining the rural household access to land; she argues that it conditioned the political and social position which is the underlying basis of women's subordination.[77] However, in rural India power for women as women cannot merely be constructed by power in the economic sphere, that is land ownership. There were and still are caste and customary constraints, among other things, to be considered.

During the last decade much feminist writing on the subcontinent has sought to remove women's "invisibility" in social action and social knowledge. The chief focus of attack is "patriarchy" which is held responsible for perpetrating inequality, injustice and oppression of women by men. It has been correctly argued that its usage is problematic.[78] The term "patriarchy" is synonymous with

[76]Ursula Sharma, Women, Work and Property in North-Western India (Delhi, 1980).

[77]Bina Aggarwal, "Who sows? Who reaps? Women and land rights in India", Journal of Peasant Studies, 14, 4, 1988, p. 535.

[78]Sheila Rowbotham, "The trouble with patriarchy", in Mary Evans (ed.), The Woman Question, (London, 1982), pp. 38–43.

the institutional structure of male domination—the rule of the father or the oldest male in the family, exchange or sale of women by men, and the control by men of women's sexual activity and fertility. However, the social construction of gender in various cultures has shown there were many complex issues in gender relations which privileged the male perspective over the female, and the use of such a term negates the process of interaction involving power differences. Moreover, it defines women as "muted objects" who merely produced and reproduced cultural norms without contributing to them, defining or even challenging them.

Feminist scholarship in India generally agrees that woman's subordination was also governed by the ideology of *pativrata* (a woman's devotion and subordination to the husband) which "provides the ready references, rules of the thumb, and the directives" which govern gender differences in society. By definition, men were seen as ritually pure, physically stronger and emotionally mature whilst women were impure, weak and immature. Women were believed to be unscrupulous and their intellect destructive. Both men and women were cautioned not to rely upon a woman's word. Men were expected to be assertive so that women understood their place and were kept under control. Within this belief system, a woman's position was further weakened because marital residence was usually patrilocal and descent patrilineal. The real purpose of a woman's existence was to fulfil her various assigned roles as daughter, sister, wife and mother.[79] In this argument male and female energy were recognised as different and there was a need to coalesce and combine to bring forth life. The male principle was one of *vigyan* (consciousness), and the female is *shakti* (primordial strength). Another view supporting this dichotomy is represented by Vandana Shiva, who argues that

[79]Vanaja Dhruvarajan, Hindu Women and the Power of Ideology, (Delhi, 1990).

women could give life, and like nature, were sacredly empowered to provide the psychic energy to nurture life, unlike men who sought to dominate and master nature, leading to the exclusion of women from participation.[80] This latter view supports the theoretical determinism in the nature versus culture debate which is both an incorrect and inadequate explanation of the valuations given to gender and social action within society. The argument against the male perspective, by which men are vested with primary rights in kinship and economic spheres, needs to be more thoroughly investigated in all extant political, social and cultural systems which grant preference to men over women. Although femaleness was sometimes positively valued for and in itself, being female had distinctly negative connotations which were discernible through these cultural valuations and representations.

Another construction of gender takes its cue from biology—"man was the provider of the seed and woman was the field".[81] Gender roles were conceived, enacted and learnt within this environment and kept in mind by the wider implications of kinship. The notion of entitlement to family was defined by birth, caste and religion, which gave a special character "to growing up female". A male child was regarded as the "light of the lineage and the provider for the future, one who would alter the family fortunes". Such studies focus on the sociology of gender and exclude its politics; they also further the argument in favour of socialisation. There is a need, however, to ask who is socialising whom ? How and why? Otherwise it suggests a one-way street: those in power over others socialise them, and those receiving socialisation simply receive it, rather than being complicit or

[80]Vandana Shiva, Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development in India, (Delhi, 1988).
[81]Leela Dube, "On the construction of gender: Hindu girls in patrilineal India", Economic and Political Weekly, XXIII, 1988, WS 11–24.

active in this interaction, and they may go on and socialise others. Surely life is far more complex than that. Men, women and children imbibe information about how to behave, think and represent from many sources; they comply and resist as the occasion arises, and they also return something to the "socialiser(s)"—which may or may not alter the kind of socialising done. So it is important to discern the differences in power and the levels of interaction along with the cultural aspects in constructing gender, to understand the gendered nature of politics.

Although there have been many studies in the sociology, anthropology and economics of gender in India, both empirical and theoretical studies on how it informed politics in modern Indian history is quite recent. Rosalind O'Hanlon and Tanika Sarkar argue for the need to examine the status of women and their influence in politics. Each of them looks at different issues. O'Hanlon examines gender discourse in social reform, whilst Sarkar examines its impact on nationalist politics. Discussing issues of widowhood in the late nineteenth century, O'Hanlon argues that the *élite* men in India were effectively recruited to the colonial enterprise of objectification and depoliticisation strategies in order to define what was essential and original in Hindu scriptures, as the basis for law. She further notes that pandits themselves were asked to base their replies on what officials assumed to be the ultimate authority of the *sastras* as part of the wider process of traditionalisation.[82] Women's efforts to contest their subordination are seen through the writings of Tarabai Shinde. In a not dissimilar way, Tanika Sarkar states that although women's political participation was encouraged in Bengal, the limits of its expression were sharply defined.[83] She argues that their visibility

[82]Rosalind O'Hanlon, A Comparison between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India, (Madras, 1994) pp. 14, 35.

[83]Tanika Sarkar, "A book of her own, a life of her own: autobiography of a nineteenth-century woman", Occasional paper, NMML, 71, 1988.

in politics did not mean a change in their subordinate status within society. Thus both agree that women's participation in social reform and nationalist politics did not amount to much, as they continued to be regarded as nothing more than adjuncts of men. However, experiences of women and men varied not only because of gender differences. Often caste, age and status were important variables which cannot be disregarded while examining gender oppression.

Most historical writings focus on middle-class, upper-caste, often urban and usually literate women. While certain observations, such as an inferior status, are applicable to being born female, the statements about dependency on men, pollution, controlled sexual activity and "Devi" symbolism are mostly about upper-caste women. There were fewer gender divisions among the labouring poor and lower-caste women. One needs to contrast the status of upper and lower-caste women taking into account age, locality and occupation in the following areas: kinship and social organisation, customary and religious life, economic and social freedom and participation in decision-making. The data must be contrasted with the status of men of similar caste, age and occupation status to understand how gender relations were mediated within rural society.

In eastern U.P., given the social and cosmological framework, a number of factors appear to have influenced the constructions of masculinity and femininity. I learned and witnessed from my women informants how women and men were dependent on each other for access to productive resources; men and women in this region shared the same culture and the same conceptual categories, and both women and low-caste men experienced different levels of exploitation in these categories according to age, occupational status, caste, and locality. To understand the dynamics of gender it is necessary to come to grips with the "full

range of cultural, symbolic and reproductive roles which men and women play as they contribute to and define the processes of human production, reproduction and regeneration of social relationships".[84]

Investigating social memory

This thesis has made extensive use of interviews with many kisan activists, men and women of the lower-castes, and a few men and women of the upper-castes.[85] Memory, however, is a selective thing which the years censor and alter. It is also intimately connected to identity. I wanted to learn not just how some of the particular aspects of the past are remembered, but also how this memory could graphically illustrate aspects of social life and social relations that defined human existence in those times. It has been argued that there is an interconnection between memory, cognition and history. The past is not only invoked by memory but also helps to structure and produce memories, insisting that individual selves are social beings. Thus there is a need to keep in mind distinctions between the past, representations of the past, historiography and the mediating role of memories.[86] It has been observed that such memory holds concepts rather than sense data. It should not be hunted "with a questionnaire or by using a butterfly net".[87] It is not organised, like texts, in the mind; there is always present the danger of imposing a mental shape on the subjects which might interfere with the

[84]Annette Weiner, "Trobriand kinship from another view: The reproductive power of men and women",Man, 14, 1978, p. 334.

[85]I wish to denote that these were not interviews in the formal sense of the word. Rather, they were in the nature of informal, and sometimes, intimate conversations with women and men, whom I had the good fortune to meet and befriend during the course of field-work in eastern U.P. between May 1991 and June 1992.

[86]Elizabeth Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History (Cambridge, 1992), p. 48.

[87]Fentress and Wickham, Social Memory, p. 2.

way they remember, or order and structure their ideas while defining personal or collective experiences.

> What is lacking in the history of subordinate groups is precisely these terms of reference that conduce to and reinforce this sense of linear trajectory, a sequential narrative shape, and here not only will most of the details be different, but the very construction of meaningful shapes will obey a different principle. Different details will emerge because they are inserted, as it were, in a different kind of narrative time.[88]

Thus it is crucial to perceive the separateness in the culture of subordinate groups where the local histories of its members have a different rhythm which is not patterned by their intervention in the working of dominant institutions. Connerton warns that the interviewer may unconsciously adjust the life history of the interviewee to a preconceived and alien model that has its origins in the culture of the ruling group. There is the need to situate what is being recollected within the mental spaces provided by the kisans as they often referred back to the material space their particular social group occupied. Connerton also discusses "mnemonic power" where the narrative is not in the past tense but in the tense of a metaphysical present.[89] These life stories in the form of a narrative can be regarded as part of an interconnected set of narratives.

The feel of those times came through in the informants' recollections of a society which has since been supplanted, but where the remnants of the material culture of that society reinforced their memories. The only language spoken in

[88]Connerton, How Societies, pp. 18–19.
[89]*Ibid.*, p. 43.

the villages by the kisans is Bhojpuri.[90] It has a rich vocabulary with certain distinct traits of morphology and syntax. Even postpositions have a local meaning that is different from the usual Hindi meaning.[91] The prose used is nimble and unencumbered but rich in nuances. I have tried wherever possible to illustrate the social life here by making use of customary songs and couplets in the following chapters.

In understanding popular politics, it is important to recognise the reverence with which the kisans regarded land. They regarded it as their sole means of livelihood, hence it inspired their deepest emotions. They refused to engage in any attempt openly to subdue nature and preferred to remain subordinate to it. The daily rhythm of life varied with the seasons. Time is not conceived here as it is normally understood in the modern West. The kisans depended on the reckoning of the seasonal calendar for most occasions. Although the kisans had been conscious of a certain form of history, the succession of events was not seen as just irreversible or unforseeable but also as possessing autonomous value. Take, for instance, their attitudes towards such contingencies as famine, the diseases that afflicted them, or the instances of cattle wiped out by disease, the illness of a child, even death—these were not seen as due to chance but attributed to the supernatural, be it a magical or demonic influence. Everything that happened happened intentionally, someone or something meant it to happen. Theirs was not linear, concrete, historical time but a belief in the mythical time, "the be-

[90]There are five officially recognised variants in the Bhojpuri dialect: the northern dialect is spoken in Gorakhpur, Basti and Deoria, the western dialect in Banaras, Mirzapur and the lower part of Azamgarh and in Ballia, the dialect is similar to north-western Bihar. Other forms of this dialect are Nepali, Nagpuriya and Southern Bhojpuri.

[91]Colin Masica, The Indo-Aryan Language, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 231, and R. McGregor, Outline of Hindi Grammar, (Delhi, 1977) p. 3. The term postposition is the technical linguistic term for Indo-Aryan languages, corresponding to the English (and general European) preposition.

ginning of things", where it was necessary to transcend the human condition.[92] It was a philosophy that significantly influenced their conceptions of being and reality.

I am thus also arguing that cosmology is integral to their world view. It not only conditioned their notions of time and space but also influenced memory, cognition and history. It can be defined here as their metaphysical understanding of the world and is vital to the structure of the arguments on popular culture, guiding the choice and interpretation of events indicated by such questions as, where have we come from? How is the world made? What is my place in it?[93] The kisans were trapped in a hand-to-mouth existence and experienced chronic fears of hunger and death from disease, famine and floods. For example, they interpreted history by the grammar of terror—*kand*—and it was not only because violence was an important component of their socio-cultural reality.[94] In reconstructing their way of life there is a need to recognise these factors as predominant, and to recognise how they encouraged a deep mysticism and belief in the occult to reveal the existence of some higher reality to keep hope alive. They believed that an order of intuitive wisdom was always present which only living on the land, and drawing strength from it, could bring. Sheetal Tripathi, a Communist kisan leader, remarked to me that it provided the substance, the centre around which the widespread struggles against *julum* acquired powerful social meanings.[95]

[92]Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History (London, 1955), p. 96.

[93]Tonkin, Narrating, pp. 68–69.

[94]Interview with Bangali Ram, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 14 September 1991. Also Gyanendra Pandey, "The revolt of August 1942 in eastern U.P. and Bihar" in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), The Indian Nation in 1942, (Calcutta, 1988), footnote 1, p. 159.

[95]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, 9 February 1992.

It is true that memory recorded through speech constitutes a raw document, the rhythms of speech duplicating the rhythms of the mind. Memory can be subjected to lapses reflecting individuals' preoccupations and silences; it is inevitably a less prepared exercise than an autobiography which has been thought through. Sometimes it was possible to check the informants' claims against the documentary sources while at other times many valuable details emerged that had not been documented at all. There is both less and more information in speech than in the written word. They are very different forms of communication, and therefore careful consideration is necessary in comparing one with another. One needs to ask what are the similarities and differences, and analyse how "facts" are represented. Sometimes it does not really matter whether the statements are accurate; what is (deemed) important to historians are the sentiments behind it. It is hoped that the result of this study will be to convey how the kisans understood themselves within the context of their environment, culture and politics. While describing the whole context of agriculture and political work by direct descriptions, they frequently made use of anecdotes and dry humour. As they recalled the bygone decades, each of them illuminated the many ways by which the political experience of the past had been expressed and conceptualised in this region.

Summary of the Chapters

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One examines the agrarian structure of Gorakhpur division. It contrasts the two forms of knowledge, the colonial or official with popular understanding of the physical environment, land tenure, time, work and cosmology. I argue that these two images were at cross

purposes with each other. To the kisans, the language of the state symbolised the language of predation and exploitation which was embodied by institutions such as zamindari. The meanings of *julum* are examined to illustrate how the political struggle for social justice sought to transform and reverse the official version of reality. Chapter Two is an analysis of gender, caste and religion and its influence on and by 'politics'. Although caste and religious identities acquired distinctly new meanings in the political context, I argue that popular politics made no fundamental change to the pre-existing system of gender relations, because it was not in any way the object of the protest.

Chapter Three focuses on the meanings of political participation that led to the growth of *chetna* (or awakening) among the kisans. The political education that certain social reform movements such as the Arya Samaj were able to provide is examined in this chapter. It covers the background until the elections of 1937 and investigates the meanings of the "Congress". Many of its local leaders subverted the official symbols of power and showed readiness to voice the anxieties of the kisans, to whom they were able to present the possibility of establishing a just social order in opposition to the existing one. The local leaders or *netas* explored and drew upon all kinds of popular associations with the environment, local myths, legends and customs that powerfully affected the ordinary lives of people. I show how the kisans realised their political identities, not simply within the framework of the nationalist discourse but at least as much against it.

Chapter Four discusses the widespread organised agitations by the kisans against *julum* and covers the period 1936–47. By placing the kisans' demands for outright ownership of land and the abolition of illegal levies on the immediate agenda, I show how the Congress came to power with their active support; new

agencies and structures came into being which seriously sought to enter into the minds and experiences of the kisans. Finally, Chapter Five investigates the ferocity of these movements against "the reactionary Congress raj" between 1947 and 1960. Although the kisans were a continuing political presence, they no longer occupied centre stage. The rifts within the parties and the strengthening of the left wing caused considerable alarm within the ruling party which was dominated by the right wing. There was a serious shortage of all essential commodities but the worst problem was the problem of hunger caused by the prolonged famine. Despite the severity of the times the kisans continued to agitate and zamindari abolition was finally effected in 1950.

Chapter 1

Two Kinds of Knowledge

This chapter contrasts the official and dominant culture, which defined part of the generally accepted reality on the one hand with, on the other hand, the popular world view in relation to such things as the physical environment, land tenure, time, work, gender, caste and cosmology. These fundamental attitudes and beliefs informed formal and informal values which governed the relationships of human beings in nature and society. These processes were reflected in the local customs and governed ethical prescriptions. It is argued that the creation by the colonial government of a social and physical landscape in its own image and for its own requirements tended to undermine, oppose, disrupt and destroy that landscape as it was perceived by the indigenous people. Such an exposition is necessary in order to illustrate the sharp contrast between the two systems of representation and the nature of power relations which the movements against *julum* sought to transform and reverse.

The physical setting

The districts of Gorakhpur, Basti and Azamgarh form a rather flat, fertile and extensive plain in the north-eastern reaches of Uttar Pradesh. In nineteenth-century British administrative records, this portion of Awadh was classified as Gorakhpur division, the largest division in the United Provinces of Agra and

Awadh. The region under study covers an area of 9,491 sq. kms.[1] Basti and Gorakhpur comprise the extensive trans-Ghaghra tract which stretches from the lowlands of Nepal towards Gonda. Azamgarh lies to the south in the Gangetic valley with the river Ghagra providing a natural boundary.

Nearly all the rivers rising in the Shiwaliks flow through Nepal to this region providing it with an abundant supply of water. The main river system in Basti is the Rapti which winds its way from the north before branching into the Burhi Rapti, Banganga and the Jamuwar. It enters Haveli *pargana* in Maharajganj *tahsil* and turns south to join the Gandak, an important river in Gorakhpur. The main tributaries are the Khetira, Hirni, Ghatur, Maun and Duhari. The Kuwana which flows into Khalilabad *tahsil* forms the Katnehia and the Rawai. Another major river, the Ami, which has its source in Bansi *tahsil* flows across the uplands and drains into the Amiar *tal*. Other important rivers are the Rohin, Baghela and the Piyas. In Azamgarh, the Ghagra flows through the northern tract for nearly forty-four miles. The Chhoti Saryu flows through the uplands to join the Ghagra which rises in Fyzabad, crosses Atraulia and enters Gopalpur *pargana*. The Tonns is another important river and its confluents are the Kunwari, Ungri, Majhui, Silani, Saksui and the Kayar. In the southern tract all the rivers such as the Gangi, Udanti, Besu, Mangai and Bhainsakhi flow eastward and drain into the river Sarju. In addition to all these rivers there are numerous *jhils, tals* (lakes), *talabs* (ponds) and wells scattered throughout the districts. These are an important feature. For instance, nearly 140,000 acres of land in Azamgarh remained permanently submerged under water.[2]

[1]Census of India: North-Western Provinces and Oudh, (Calcutta, 1891), XVI, p. 88, until 1946, Gorakhpur covered an area of 4,576 sq.kms, Basti 2,767 sq.kms and Azamgarh 2,148.3 sq.kms.

[2]D. L. Drake-Brockman, Azamgarh, A Gazetter (Allahabd, 1911), p. 7.

This belt can be divided into three distinct zones. The trans-Rapti or the *terai* in the north consists of the *tahsils* of Bansi, Dummariaganj and Maharajganj which used to be heavily forested. The *upahar* is in the centre and consists of the *tahsils* of Khalilabad, Basti and Gorakhpur. In the south the lower valley of the Ghagra forms the *tarhar*. This three-zone division—the terai, upahar and tarhar give this region a distinctive topography, pattern of land-use and sense of place. The plain is covered by dense layers of alluvium. There is a distinction between the *bangar* (old alluvium) and the *kacchar* (new alluvium), giving rise to two basic types of soil.[3] The first is porous and covered by sand, gravel, shingle, pebbles and boulders brought down by mountain streams. The second type is loamy and calcareous. It contains a fine deposition of riverine materials. This kind of soil formation is found in the northern *tahsils* of Dummariaganj, Bansi and Maharajganj. Here the land is marshy and there are some large swamps. Prior to deforestation during the 1950s and 1960s, there were dense forests of *sal* and *mahua* trees near the Sonari, Piyas and Rohin rivers. A feature of the Ghagra uplands is the large expanse of sandy ground known as *dewaras* covered with *jhan* or tamarisk.[4]

Almost the entire population in Gorakhpur division lived in villages. Until the 1950s there were only one or two larger towns. There were hardly any roads, only narrow muddy paths to and from the countryside. The only means of transport was the bullock cart. Some large zamindaris used horse-drawn carriages and one or two local rajahs had motor cars. During the early 1930s there were one or two bicycles occasionally seen on the paths. However, nearly all the villagers travelled

[3]Rajpati Ram. "Eastern Uttar Pradesh: A Spatial Study in the Economy of Primary Production", (unpublished M.Phil Dissertation), Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1978, p. 56.

[4]H.R. Nevill, Gorakhpur, A Gazetteer (Allahabad, 1909), pp. 271–3.

on foot.

Official readings: Nature of society

The official reading of indigenous society appeared to concern itself exclusively with what has been described as the "rationalisation of economic conduct".[5] The terms of reference used to differentiate and selectively define society often disregarded local categories and distinctions: a higher status was accorded to colonial representations. Bourdieu argues that economic practices can only be understood in terms of temporal consciousness which varies with each culture.[6] Colonial attitudes towards time, calculation and forecasting introduced new schedules and calendars in socio-economic life which were at odds with the kisans' practice of waiting for natural cues for action: they experienced difficulties in adapting to the time requirements of the capitalist economy. In addition, the peasants' "submissiveness before forces they did not aspire to discipline", which could be viewed as their reverence for nature, was seen by the colonisers, as an obstacle to economic development.[7] It is also argued here that the fundamental concerns of colonialism led "to the appropriation of spaces for resource availability and extraction".[8] One instance was the preparation of detailed inventories of land use, techniques of payment, revenue and taxation—all of which were distinctly opposed to popular perceptions and ways of seeing. Thus to understand fully the genesis of popular politics, one must contrast this colonial paradigm with the

[5]Pierre Bourdieu, Algeria 1960: The Disenchantment of the World (Cambridge, 1970), p. 7.
[6]*Ibid.*
[7]*Ibid.*, p. 16.
[8]Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin (eds.), Bush Base: Forest Farm; Culture, Environment and Development, (London, 1992), p. 32.

kisan perspective.

From the official viewpoint there was a great deal of pressure on the land because of the density of the population. Agriculture constituted the chief source of livelihood with 98.2% of the population engaged in it compared to an average of 86% for U.P. as a whole.[9] Estimates in 1960 illustrate the dependency on land continued to be high. For example it was noted that the total population in Basti, Gorakhpur, Deoria, Azamgarh, Ballia, Ghazipur and Jaunpur was 12,684,354, and 11,795, 611 were villagers for whom agriculture constituted the only source of income.[10]

This division had always been regarded as the most heavily populated. According to another contemporary estimate, in 1899 there were about 500 cultivators per square mile, which roughly works out at three quarters of an acre per family.[11] The figure for Gorakhpur division was close to a thousand cultivators per square mile. However, it was the tremendous insecurity generated by the system of agricultural tenure here, and not the pressure on land, which made land appear scarce. The average size of the holdings recorded in nearly all the official reports varied from 2.5 to 3.5 acres. But this was incorrect because it did not take into account *sir, khudkasht* and other kinds of land; also the size of an individual holding was subject to regional and temporal variations. For instance it was noted in November 1936 that in the six *tahsils* of Gorakhpur, the area cultivated by an average peasant household in 1931 was recorded as follows: Sadr 2.1 acres, Maharajganj 2.5 acres, Bansgaon 1.4 acres, Padrauna 1.5 acres,

[9]United Provinces Banking Enquiry Commission Report, I, (Calcutta, 1931), p. 11.
[10]*Aaj*, 9 September 1960.
[11]S.N. Jafri, The History and Status of Landlords in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, (Allahabad, 1931), pp. 377–78.

Hata 0.9 acres and in Deoria 0.65 acres.[12] Elsewhere it was reported that the size of a holding was 0.59 to 0.67 of an acre.

It was difficult to arrive at a standard measurement of a holding at any given time because the land changed hands quite frequently and fragmentation was common. It was also difficult to estimate the number of peasants who owned plots measuring 0.01 to 0.0025 of a *bigha* (officially measured as three-twentieths of an acre) but it was fairly large.[13] Thus the size of the average land holding was usually well below the subsistence limit. For instance, in Gorakhpur division it was calculated that a cultivator's expenses were much higher than the value of the crop. It was calculated that if the value of the produce was Rs. 63.3, the cultivator's expenses were often double, Rs. 130.1. So he or she was left with a debt of Rs. 66.8.[14]

It was reported in 1931, that in Gorakhpur division 33.1% of the cultivators had subsidiary occupations, much larger than the figure of 11.5% for the rest of the province. In the United Provinces Banking Enquiry Committee Report, it was argued that the high figure in subsidary occupations was indicative of prosperity.[15] However, it was precisely because agriculture did not ensure a minimum income that cultivators and their families were forced to resort to a variety of alternative occupations which often depended on personal ingenuity and wit, such as taking up roles as mendicants, wandering minstrels and *sainsokhas* (practitioners of folk medicine).[16] Ideally, the kisans would have liked to live on the earnings from land but poverty and oppression forced the men to migrate as

[12]UPPCC, The Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report (Gurgaon, 1982), p. 25.
[13]*Ibid.*, pp. 17–18. The measurement of a *bigha* varied, see p. 51.
[14]Walter C. Neale, Economic Changes in Rural India: Land Tenure and Reform in Uttar Pradesh, 1800–1955, (New Haven, 1962), p. 170.
[15]UPBECR, II, p. 27.
[16]*Ibid.*, p. 181.

labour to the tea plantations of Assam and jute mills of Calcutta or as indentured labour overseas. These labourers remitted a large proportion of their earnings to their families living in the villages and so kept them going.

These official records principally reflect the colonial obsession with the detailed classification of proprietary rights: the ownership and control of land (and its produce) was perceived as the chief criterion in the availability and collection of revenue. Whitcombe has rightly observed that no institution of the British empire so epitomised the imperial presence as zamindari.[17] There were sharp distinctions made between zamindars and non-zamindars, between full proprietorship and other subordinate rights. There were three forms of land ownership: zamindari, *pattidari* and *bhaiachara*. The zamindars were defined as superior proprietors who had complete ownership rights. There were two kinds of zamindari: single or *wahid*, and joint or *bilijmal*. *Pattidari* and *bhaiachara* tenures were kinship based; they were jointly owned property partitioned on account of family dissensions. Shares were fractional according to the law of inheritance, and the villages which were owned by a family or clan were recorded in circle numbers, for example, *chorasi* (84 villages), or *chobisi* (24 villages) and so forth.[18] A single grantee, purchaser or revenue farmer could become the legal owner of a village or several villages. If his estate was jointly administered by his descendants then it was considered as perfect *pattidari*. But if it was divided into shares or *pattis*, then it was termed imperfect *pattidari*. An average *pattidari* holding was reckoned to be about fifteen acres.[19] While *bhaiachara* was prevalent in Gorakhpur, *birtadari* was more common in Basti. In Azamgarh, *bighadam* tenure prevailed. These

[17]Elizabeth Whitcombe, "Whatever happened to the zamindars?" in Eric J. Hobsbawm et al (eds.), Peasants in History: Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner (Calcutta, 1980), p. 156.
[18]B.H. Baden Powell, Land Systems in British India (1892; Reprint: Delhi, 1974), p. 105.
[19]A. G. Clow, Settlement Report of Basti, (Allahabad, 1919), p. 10.

Table 1.1: Distribution of Proprietorship, Basti District, 1919[a]

Proprietors	Number of villages
Single Zamindars	786
Joint Zamindaris	1451
Pattidars	5254
Bhaiachara	10
Revenue Free	137
Total Number of Villages	7638

[a]UPBECR, I, p. 19.

were all based on land grants made during Mughal times to cultivating groups of clansmen who were not chiefs but commoners. The figures in table 1.1 for Basti district give a rough idea of the distribution of proprietorship in this region.

It is necessary to understand not just the nature of proprietorship but also its workings, which the kisans expressed as *julum*. One has to examine the institution of zamindari which was rooted in the wider infrastructure of colonial rule. The trans-Rapti tract consisted predominantly of rather large estates. What the reports do not mention was that these large zamindaris, also known as taluqdaris, functioned principally through the institution of *thekedari*.[20] Each *theka* (contract of revenue) consisted of a village or part of it, which was leased by the zamindar to the highest bidder from among his kinsmen. The *thekedar* (bailiff) paid the zamindar a *nazarana* (premium) and took charge of rent collection. Depending on his efficiency as a *thekedar* the agreement with the zamindar could either be allowed to lapse or be renewed. These bailiffs were also called *karindas* of the zamindars; some of these *thekedars* such as Babu Shorhat Singh, and the Raja of Tejgarh who had started off as the bailiffs of the Raja of Bansi, later became powerful zamindars through extortion of the cultivators.[21]

[20]Interview with Gorakh Babu, Bansi estate, Bansi, 27 January 1992.
[21]Interview with Dwaraka Prasad, Bansi, 26 January 1992.

Large proportions of land were owned by a few families leaving the rest of the families with very little control over the the land on which they depended for their livelihood. Kisans working on lands belonging to these estates were particularly victimised by both the zamindars and the *thekedars*; the trans-Rapti tract provided the principal ground for the struggles against zamindari. There were a few powerful zamindars who controlled enormous estates, the largest in Gorakhpur division belonged to the Raja of Bansi, who resided in Basti district. He owned about 76,338 acres in Bansi, 12,110 acres in Nagar, 16,435 acres in Rasulpur and numerous villages in Gorakhpur.[22] Another powerful zamindar was Babu Shorhat Singh of Chandapar, who owned 49 villages in Shorhatgarh. His grandson, Shivpati Singh, was made a Raja by the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Malcolm Hailey in the 1940s. This zamindari was to achieve particular notoriety for its *jalim* (cruel) raj, as did the estates of Chatera and Raja of Tejgarh to the north-western Bansi. The latter estate consisted of about twenty villages. In the south, the Raja of Mahson owned 65 villages. At Piprahia, the Gautams owned 60 villages. The Babus of Mehndawal owned 64 villages and the Babus of Rudhauli owned 59 villages. The Ganeshpur estate, consisting of 54 villages, belonged to the Pindari Amir Khan who was nicknamed *Daku Khan* (dacoit leader) by the villagers. There were a number of European families who had forest grants and were principally engaged in the cultivation of indigo and opium. Important examples were the Birdpur estate owned by Captain Bird, and other estates such as Dulha, Neora, Alidpur, Cooke and Bridgemanganj. Some of these grantees, like the Peppe family, owned estates in neighbouring Maharajganj. In Gorakhpur the chief proprietors were the Rajas of Padrauna and Tamokhi, Subhanullah and

[22]Interview with Gorakh Babu, 27 January 1992.

the Mahant of Harpur, who owned 36 villages, and the Sabzposh family, who owned 16 villages; there were other large estates such as Jara in Maharajganj. In Azamgarh, the Raja Muhammed Salamat Khan was the chief proprietor, and as *Khanzada* owned about 5,000 acres; the Raja of Jaunpur owned about 69 villages and had ten *pattis*; the Dube family, the Babus of Sidhari and the Sayyids of Mahul were the other important landowners. The main European grantees were John Sturmer of the Khajha estate in Muhammadabad, and T.A. Martin who owned nine villages in Mahul.

In the south the nature of land ownership was characterised by petty zamindars. Official documents note that typically small proprietorship consisted of ownership of a few *pattis*, reckoned to be not more than ten or fifteen acres. *Pattidari* tenure often "embarrassed" the administration for causing inefficiency in revenue collection. The *pattidars* often let out their land, and it was not uncommon to find that a single kisan's land often ran into the property of several *pattidars*; these kisans were faced with the problem of paying rent to different *pattidars*, each of whom belonged to the same *biradari* or family. Disputes often erupted when intra-family feuding developed between the *pattidars* with one trying to outdo the other by increasing his or her share of land rights. This feuding led to bitter strife and litigation. It also led to minute sub-division of holdings. If there was a conflict between male or female succession, women got the worse deal. Although widows and daughters could inherit property, it was managed by the men. In 1919, the settlement officer noted that in 1891 the number of *mahals* exceeding the number of holdings was only 51; however due to "the orgy of partition" everything was divided into shares, plots, holdings, groves and even

ponds. Where no formal partition had taken place an informal one was evident.[23]

Pattidari tenure was a common feature in the Cis-Rapti and the Ghagra valley. It was also known as the *lambardari* system, and was officially described as consisting of "a crowd of petty proprietors".[24] The *patwari*'s records are useful as they reveal how family relations determined the shape of many non-market transfers of land, especially via marriage and inheritance. One can correlate the geneology of tiny holdings or subdivisions of plots of land with the people in the villages and this would make possible an interesting study of land transfers. The fragmentation of land led to minute holdings, usually because of the inevitable tension between one *pattidar* and another, each one trying to dispossess the other of his or her legal rights. These problems were fairly old, dating back to the first settlement.[25] There were frequent boundary disputes and the fixing of revenue between the proprietors themselves or the principal zamindar on the one hand, and the numerous small zamindars on the other. As early as 1900, the revenue administration recorded a sizeable increase in the number of warrants and writs *vis-à-vis* the transfer of property. It criticised the minute subdivisions of property and the complexity of tenure which posed a severe strain on the mechanism of the revenue system.[26] This also made accurate registration of land impossible. The mutations in the revenue registers indicated that the most marked cases were in Gorakhpur subdivision. In Basti there were more than 6,000 mutation cases during 1900 and registrar *qanungos* had 6,494 undisposed cases still on their

[23]Clow, Settlement Report of Basti p. 18.

[24]United Provinvces Revenue Administrative Reports (henceforth UPRAR), (Calcutta, 1900).

[25]Report of the Collector of Azimgurh on the Settlement of the Ceded Portion of the District commonly called Chuklah Azamgarh, (Agra, 1837), p. 26, paras. 116–7.

[26]UPRAR, 1901, p. 21.

hands.[27] Thus there was tremendous anxiety, even among small landholders, who often faced the possibility of losing their rights to a rival claimant. Because of the concentration of petty zamindars, the movements against *julum* were weaker here: many pattidars were frequently engaged in land ownership and boundary disputes with other co-sharers and kisans were caught in the cross-fire.

Was there "a limited raj" ?

Anand Yang has characterised local government in Bihar during colonial times as a "limited raj", a collaborative system of government whereby the indigenous controlling systems (the zamindars) provided the effective government and rule in local society.[28] He argues that "the power and authority of the state [was] largely refracted through local systems and strategies of control".[29] At the district level, the power of the colonial state ceased to be operative: "its supra-local power and authority made it imperative that local controllers either obviate the British presence altogether or re-channel resources to further their own objectives".[30] However, it is difficult to regard these systems and strategies of control as local. They had both the implicit backing of the colonial state and were explicitly integrated into its structure by the continuous interaction of a system of centralised colonial law and officialdom with rural social networks.

Yang underestimates the extent to which the colonial state arrogated the fundamental structure of authority and power to itself. It was in the interests of the colonial system to supplement its own formal institutions by manipulating

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 23, para 69.
[28] Anand A. Yang, The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India; Saran District, 1793–1920, (Berkeley, 1989).
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 235.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

these indigenous social networks in producing and reproducing social and political identities. This process generated a "culture of terror" in which relations of domination (the bailiffs, *goondas, chowkidars*) were built into the culture and life of the kisans. They were fearful of both the cumbersome and ruthless bureaucratic structure which constantly monitored their activities.[31] The zamindar was at the pivot of the same oppressive order which was administered by the *chowkidar, amin, patwari, daroga* and the *qanungo* who were salaried employees of the raj and who exploited their positions of influence, being privileged with a *"sarkari naukari"* (government job). A kisan *neta* said "the truth of the matter was that there were many faces of the government *angreezi hukumat* [British rule] but a good deal of its origins and workings remained concealed";[32] The zamindar was blamed for ills that could not be blamed on the kisans (who were otherwise seen to be responsible for most of the shortcomings in society), when it suited the government, although he believed that in actual fact *julum* by the zamindar and the workings of the government were one and the same thing. That was why to him, zamindari abolition was as important as *swaraj.* This view is supported by a government official who notes, for instance, that the practice of *begar* and *hari* was not confined to the zamindars or their hirelings. Yezdi Gundevia illustrates the nature of *begar* and *hari* which he witnessed in every district he had served in:

> There was *begar* in my camp, day and night. Who provided the milk for my camp and my camp followers? Who brought the vegetables, meat, chicken and fish for me and for all the inmates of my camp?

[31]Michael Taussig, Shamanism. Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing (Chicago, 1978). This term has been borrowed from him.
[32]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, 9 February 1992.

> Who got the fodder for the bullocks of all the carts we engaged during our tours? Who pitched the tents, and where did the labour for all this come from? [33]

The kisans were conscious of foreign rule in other ways as well—the vessels they used for cooking were made from *vilayati mathi*(imported pig iron).[34] To them, the most obvious manifestation of British rule was its powerful administrative edifice: the *kutcherry* (courts) controlled by the Collector, his junior officers, the underlings and the zamindars. The kisans often felt themselves condemned to be pawns of forces beyond their control or understanding.[35]

How, then, did the working of the administration impinge upon the lives of the kisans? And how did it reflect the particular anxieties that the kisans voiced in their struggle against *julum*? The zamindars were seen as the lords of the land, the dominant social class in rural society. They were portrayed in official sources as the harbingers of progress in rural development and could generally be counted upon to co-operate with the Collector and the district staff to render any kind of assistance. The zamindars were responsible for securing revenue and the administration endorsed its interests, vesting it with temporal and judicial authority: all lands including pastures and forests were under their control. The kisans were aware of *badey* (big) zamindars and the *chootey* (small) zamindars but believed there was no difference between the two because they or their agents acted in the same way: both were equally oppressive. Certainly in its operational sense, the institution of zamindari provided the critical hinge in administering revenue. Further, these zamindars were the post-Mutiny loyalists questing for

[33]Yezdi Gundevia, In the Districts of the Raj (Bombay, 1992), p. 141.
[34]Interview with Jaggi Devi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 6 February 1992.
[35]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, 9 February 1992.

Table 1.2: Number of zamindars: Gorakhpur division 1881–1945[a]

1881	1901	1911	1926	1945
182,401	257, 213	261, 255	604,419	2,363,431

[a]Peter D. Reeves, Landlords and Government in the Uttar Pradesh: A Study of Their Relations until Zamindari Abolition (1920–1950) (Delhi, 1991), p. 39.

marks of British favour such as titles.[36] In the trans-Rapti, the heavily forested tract was cleared and here more than elsewhere the big zamindars (Metcalf prefers the term taluqdars) emerged as sole proprietors with no checks on their powers. They were responsible for the payment of revenue and given unlimited licence to do as they pleased. By the 1930s, the kisans saw themselves as hapless victims of zamindari *julum* for nearly three-quarters of a century, so to them, "a good zamindar" simply could not exist.

Table 1.2 illustrates the sharp increase in the number of landlords. This phenomenal increase in the number of zamindars does not suggest that land was redistributed, rather the contrary: land belonging to the kisans was recorded in the names of zamindar's kin.[37]This claim is supported in the Zamindari Abolition records which state that between 1884 and 1931 there was an increase of 78% in the number of non-cultivating landlords in the U.P.[38]

In Awadh there were a few powerful landowners and it was recorded in 1931 that more than 89% of the cultivating population had little or no rights over the land. The kisans could not use any part of the village land, whether it was *abadi*, *usar*, *charaghi* or *banjjar*, without a zamindar's permission. Nor could they exercise the right to sell, mortgage or alienate the land. A considerable

[36]Thomas R. Metcalf, Land, Landlords and the British Raj: Northern India in the Nineteenth Century, (Berkeley, 1979), p. 240.
[37]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, 29 September 1991.
[38]Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition Committee, I, (Lucknow, 1948), p. 7.

percentage of the proceeds from the village fairs (*mandis*) had to be paid to the zamindars. These markets were controlled by the zamindar's agents and a fee was extracted from the buyers and sellers who were left to negotiate deals among themselves.

The language of caste

In his analysis of the zamindars in Awadh, Reeves discusses how the official interpretations of an unchanging Hindu society influenced government. The debates of the 1870s represented the caste system to reveal "the main lines as they affect the character of the people and their political future". The "Oudh men" believed that the solution lay in locating the traditional political authority. Then it would be possible to devise a policy. "The Kshatriya not the Brahman", was regarded as a "national king": there was a construction of a distinct set of categories which influenced government. The kisans (like other strata within society) were perceived within this mental space of cognition and representation. Only the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas and higher strata Muslims were seen as the natural leaders of society.[39] The power of the dominant model allowed these ways of seeing to constantly produce and reproduce themselves, and to impose their own principles in their construction of reality. It has been argued that the effect of the dominant ideology was to make the arbitary basis of its domination appear natural.

Thus the official view was that the upper-castes remained in control of the micro-mechanisms of power as they were regarded as legitimate high-caste *élites*. Proprietorship was mainly concentrated in the hands of the upper-castes as a

[39]Reeves, Landlords and Government, p. 44.

Table 1.3: Distribution of land ownership by Caste[a]

Caste	Acres
Brahmins	298,200
Kshatriyas	368,074
Bhumihar	231,130
Kayasth	54,642
Muslims	24,056
Vaishya	49,240
Saithwas	185,125
Halwais	31,955
Ahirs	8,214
Atiths	13,074
Koeris	6,283
Others	5,407
Total	1,329,664

[a]E.A. Phelps, Final Report of the Revision of Settlement in Gorakhpur district (Allahabad, 1919), Appendix 3, p. 41.

result of the official ideology. Nearly two-thirds of the land was held by the Rajputs, Brahmins, Bhumihars (of Brahmin and Kshatriya descent), and upper strata Muslims such as the Sheikhs and the Sayyids. They were considered the superior castes in line with contemporary official literature. They were seen to represent the economic wherewithal, in that they controlled most of the land and resources. In table 1.3, the distribution of land among various castes confirms this view.

Official records saw caste as having distinct and irreversible characteristics such as endogamy, ritual practices, commensality rules, and fixed occupation. To these adherents of legalistic thinking, nearly all native practices and customs could be directly deduced from expressly constituted and legally sanctioned rules. The official categorisation, based partly on traditional views, saw the following castes as fixed in their occupations: Kandus were grain parchers and *halva* makers, Nonias were experts at digging wells, Lohars were blacksmiths, Barais

were *pan* (betel leaf) makers and tobacco sellers but were also good entertainers, Dharikar were bamboo workers and made woven baskets and fans from bamboo strips, Musahars and the Doms were regarded "as thieving aboriginals with jungle ways". The Nais were barbers and sometimes worked with the Mallahs as boatmen supplementing their income by doing odd jobs like cutting and sawing trees, Telis processed oil from mustard seed and had expert knowledge of medicinal plants, Gaderiyas and Ahirs were the herders, Malis were flower raisers, Kahars were water-carriers and also used to plaster the mud houses. Helas made winnowing trays from stalks. Kalvars and Telis had the right to weigh. Chamars were "the scavengers" who removed corpses and carcasses. They tanned leather and were "the lowest of the low" in terms of social standing. In Azamgarh there was a sizeable population of Julahas who were esteemed for their expertise in carding, spinning and weaving of cotton and silk and so on. However, contradictions emerge in these official readings of caste occupations. For instance, whether a Dom may or may not have been a "criminal", he was seen as a member of a criminal tribe and inevitably a thief. Colonial rule shaped cultural processes through the deployment of concepts and values in a variety of institutions—the kisans were unable to argue against these representations by the colonial state.

In the colonial context, identities had a way of defining even the people who rejected them: caste was seen less as a performance or a process, more as a tightly knit hierarchy, a functional fit. In the experience of ordinary people such official social identities ultimately determined their fate, and they were forced by circumstance into relying on those identities.[40] Official attitudes saw caste in terms of a fixed structure and thus stratified society, giving it a permanent

[40]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.

subjectivity. One important example recorded by a senior U.P. civil servant is revealing. During the 1931 Census operation, E.A.H. Blunt says he was surprised by the agitations against a record of caste because the people asserted that "the mere act of labelling persons as belonging to a caste tends to perpetuate the system ...It is striking that any Hindu should hold that opinion and what is even more striking is that nearly two million of them should agree with it in so far as to state that they had no caste at all."[41] Although there was also a deep consciousness of the meaning of caste to be defined by birth and hence signifying certain privileges based on rituals and duties, it was usually tempered by considerations of relative power. There were Brahmin and Kshatriya kisans with no land rights, a position they shared with many other lower-castes. It was reported in 1929 that many Brahmins had started poultry farms, an occupation that was deemed as unthinkable for one who was born Brahmin.[42] There were many poor cultivators tilling the land themselves, who were either Kshatriyas or Brahmins although the percentage of lower-castes was far greater. It was not uncommon to hire Chamars to perform agricultural tasks when there was a problem of labour scarcity.

What constituted caste identity for the kisans? The kisans said traditional activities varied from one village to another; there were other criteria depending not just on caste but also on the position of individuals and the different kinds of social interactions in the village. In practice, caste was essentially a strategy, a means of fulfilling social duties such as the sharing of *roti* (bread) and arranging for the marriage of the *beta/ bettia* (son/daughter); it also was described

[41]E.A.H. Blunt,"The structure of the Indian people" in E.A.H Blunt (ed.), Social Service in India: An Introduction to some Social and Economic Problems of the Indian People, (London, 1938), p. 60.

[42]UPBECR, p. 300, minute 36,469.

colloquially, as *hookah-pani*, that is, communal smoking of tobacco and sharing of water.[43] Notions of social hierarchy were recognised, but the boundaries varied in spatial and temporal terms; caste was primarily a performance. Caste membership was not always fixed by endogamy and other rules were not strictly adhered to because caste behaviour was negotiable.[44] The kisans did not accept the ownership of land as being the privilege of the upper-castes; they believed that everyone could own land. They regarded the little plot of land they tilled season after season as their own, and were prepared to forsake everything so that they could rise each morning in the knowledge that they would be spending a day in their "own" field.

Many of the perceived caste distinctions were reflected in the geography of living space because of the constraints of ritual purity and pollution.[45] Usually a settlement contained a cluster of 100 to 150 huts. The main settlement contained the residential areas of the dominant castes: Thakurs, Brahmins and Bhumihars. These settlements were easily identifiable by peepal and banyan trees which were guarded by shrines below of Hanuman and other Hindu deities. About four or five hundred yards away were the *bastis* or settlements of the Ahirs, Kurmis and Koeris. But the Chamar settlements were located at least eight to nine hundred yards away, usually downwind. Lower-castes normally slept under the neem trees during the warmer months. The lower-castes were forbidden to use the wells and recreational space of the upper castes. The higher castes had private wells in their compounds and easy access to water. However, the lower-castes often had to walk some distance away from their homes and depend on water from two or

[43]Interview with Ramu Kurmi, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 19 September 1991.
[44]Chapter Two deals with this issue in greater detail.
[45]See map on page 64.

three unprotected wells. Villages were commonly referred to as Thakur villages or Ahir villages or Bhumihar *ilaqa* and there were also Chamar and Teli settlements.

A further mismatch of knowledge was revealed in the general official categorisation of society as Hindu and Muslim. Pandey has pointed out that these were "well worn, essentially tautological formulae" that determined the religious character of a mass of people by imposing a monolithic unity of faith on them.[46] One needs to add also that these views were not conditioned by notions of religions as discrete groups, reflecting not just a failure to understand syncretism, but also underplaying the turbulence and contradictions in rural society. Thus many conflicts and tensions within society were frequently attributed to religious differences. These were assertions not demonstrable by any reference to historical data.[47] These official interpretations were at odds with indigenous identities which were often not formalised into rigid codes like natural laws. In reality, both Hindu and Muslim kisans shared the same difficulties and their position in the social structure did not differ very much. They also dressed alike and were part of largely the same cosmological structure.

Although there were a few administrators who were perceptive of the wider cosmological tradition, their views were often disregarded. Take, for example, one such opinion which notes that there were many Muslims among the low-caste sweepers such as the Doms but that they were "ignorant of the Mohammedan creed".[48] They conformed to the precedents of Muslim social law only in refusing to eat pork as food. However, many continued to worship and sacrifice to the Devi and other low-caste gods. In one *tahsil* of Gorakhpur, there were famous sites of

[46]Gyanendra Pandey, "Rallying around the cow: Sectarian strife in the Bhojpuri speaking region c. 1888–1917" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, II, (Delhi, 1983), p. 64.
[47]*Ibid.*
[48]R.M. Burns, Census of India, XVI (Calcutta, 1891), p. 175.

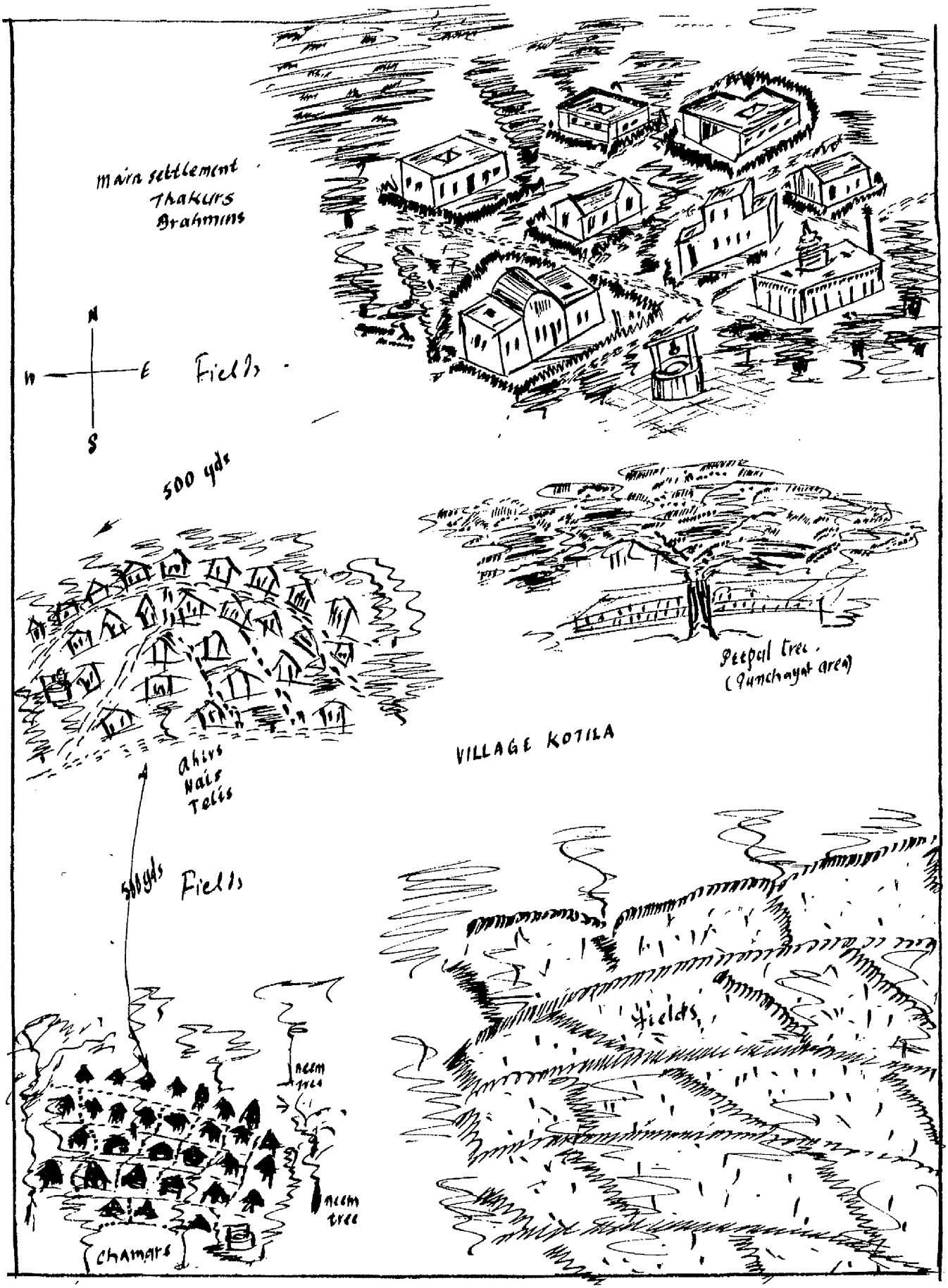

Figure 1.1 The village map

worship of the Pirs Imam Hussein, Ghazi Mian, Barepir (of the Satnami sect) and Panchonpir but the Hindu and Muslim villagers called them Kalka and Phulmati and made offerings to them. So it did not matter what the particular creed of the kisan was because his or her religious worship was influenced by the wider cosmological tradition; such forms of worship drew upon popular wisdom and also informed agricultural practices. By stressing the conflict of interests between "the two communities", official documents often overlooked the way such interests were constituted and the ways in which the kisans both interpreted and contested the structure that supposedly defined these interests. The politicisation of the kisans described in Chapters Three to Five illustrates these points in greater detail.

The ways of nature informed the religious practices of the kisans. The regular worship of gods and goddesses found in the Hindu pantheon was not central to their religious customs. In the villages, they spent most of their time propitiating the Mother goddess, stones, tree and water spirits. They believed that these spirits controlled the fertility of women and strength of the men and well-being of children. They also feared certain marked sites in every village which were along pathways or inside ponds, wells, trees and old graves; they believed them to harbour *bhoots* or *prets*. These *bhoots* were the malevolent ghosts of those who had not died peaceful deaths—murder victims, victims of female infanticide and women who had died in childbirth. The villagers believed they were claiming retribution by wandering freely and they were feared. They had an evil eye (*buri nazar*) and this could affect pregnant women, young children, the harvest and livestock. A contemporary view perceptively records that the kisan's religion was based on fear of totemistic spirits whose ill effects could be foiled by the *deva, deota* and the *devak*; these spirits resided in trees, animal or material objects

which regulated the lives of the majority of the population.[49]

The important thing to be stressed was that religious identity was essentially expressed through offerings depending not just on the symbolism of the deity but also the resources and imagination of the devotee. For instance, in the case of the mother goddess Phulmati in one village it was accepted that any of the following could be sacrificed as an offering: pig, sheep, goat, chicken, pigeon, duck or a partridge.[50] In some instances, alcohol and tobacco were given as an offering to the goddess by pouring some in the pigsty or cattle-shed.

In understanding the religious culture of the kisans and their cosmology it is important to examine how they were influenced by the wider philosophical tradition and how it informed their everyday life. Mysticism and the mystical approach are universals in all major philosophical traditions but they have a pre-eminent ontological status in the cultural heritage.[51] The doctrinal and philosophical tradition itself with its rich vocabulary relating to the subjective and psychic states, functions and phenomena from *moksha, mukti, punya, maya* and the concept of detachment, is a pervasive theme. This religious knowledge appears to have a practical side; it served not merely to embody and interpret values but was also instructive in illustrating how to proceed in life, how to participate in social situations and how to manage such situations.

Prayers, vows and chants were seen as ferries to a shore of experience beyond the temporal state. There was great belief in the powers of sacrifice (*tyaag*), and when something of value was surrendered or given up it was usually done in the expected hope of greater gain. There was an ingrained belief in the affirmation

[49]W.C. Crooke, Religion and Folklore of Northern India (London, 1926).
[50]Interview with Indu Lohar, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 30 September 1991.
[51]Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History, translated from the French by Willard R. Trask (London, 1955).

of an ongoing relationship between the givers and receivers of sacrifice. Thus wandering hermits known as *sadhus, fakirs* and *sanyyasis*, who had in theory renounced worldly pleasures, commanded considerable respect. They were seen as being capable of bringing the supernatural powers of the sacred world into the everyday human world, which could correct everything which was going wrong. It was also one of the main reasons why the Gandhian mystique could command such millenarian appeal.[52]

While the *mullah* and the *pandit* were fairly important in the lives of upper-caste Hindus and Muslims, their importance was minimal in the everyday life of the kisans.[53] They needed someone who would address the spirits and omens which contained a reservoir of meanings for them. They believed that the Ojhaiyas (exorcists and sorcerers) were not restricted by the physical limitations on human action (that were accepted in everyday life) because they could command the attention of supernatural forces chiefly by inducing and exorcising possession by evil spirits. The Ojhaiyas were usually from the lower-castes and mostly males. They were normally not resident in the village but usually arrived by word of mouth or, as they claimed, by divination.[54] Ojhaiyas worshipped both Hindu and Muslim deities and were reputed to be skilled in sorcery. They were also kisans and had a deep knowledge of practical psychology and understood the nature of social relationships and the ethos of the village. They had many names such as Bhikus and Bhagis. They were regarded as social healers and were believed to have access to both the sacred and the profane. They sought to

[52]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Ghazipur, 30 August 1991. Also Shahid Amin,"Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur district, eastern U.P., 1921-22" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, II, (Delhi, 1984), pp. 1-66.

[53]Interview with Ramanand Gupta, Amila, Azamgarh, 9 September 1991.

[54]Interview with Bangali Ram, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 14 September 1991.

erase mystical pollution by propitiating gods and other divinities, such as the tree spirits. But the kisans often stated that while they could propitiate mother nature and exorcise evil spirits, the *julum* of the zamindars and their hired underlings was another matter altogether.

Local officialdom

The official readings of society gave legal power to the the zamindars. In addition to granting zamindars proprietorship and a superior status on grounds of caste, they were entrusted with both *de facto* and *de jure* powers. They were responsible to the government for the collection of land revenue from the territory in their possession. Furthermore, there were no regulations or restrictions placed on the nature and amount of what they could collect from their tenants. Settlement officers based their reports on the information of *patwaris* in determining who the proprietors were. It was not surprising that wrong entries were made and in a very large number of cases customary rights were simply overlooked.

The law gave the zamindars and permanent tenure holders the sole right of conferring occupancy tenant rights and this proved to be very disadvantageous to the cultivator. The official legal rights of the tenants belied their poor position in practice. For example, in Awadh, the Rent Act XXIV of 1866 granted occupancy rights to those tenants who had lost their proprietary rights in the thirty years preceding 1856. They were still tenants on that land in 1866. Another such act (Act XIX of 1868) granted occupancy status to tenants who had sold their land. They were given only heritable but not transferable right of succession. It was reported that by the Act of 1869, one third of the tenants in Gorakhpur and a fifth in Basti could claim occupancy status, but twenty years later it was found

that these tenants had not claimed their rights and were still being exploited by the landlords.[55] So although the provision for occupancy rights had been granted to cultivators of a holding after seven years it was hardly ever upheld. The zamindar's word was law and no kisan would dare question it. It was not surprising that by 1883 only 7.5% of all land was cultivated by proprietors, 4.5% by sub-proprietors or occupancy tenants, and 88% by tenants-at-will.[56] The kisans were not aware of any of their rights because under colonial law all rights were vested in zamindari. Time and again it was clear that these registered grants and judicial enforcements did not necessarily mean that the tenants who were entitled to these "rights" were able to exercise them. The ambiguity of the text allowed for many loopholes and the interests of the kisans were not central. Insecurity of tenure and fears of eviction continued to haunt the cultivators. Most of their holdings were uneconomic and they were not exempt from rent or revenue; arrears of rent always made it possible for the kisans to be faced with eviction.

The revenue acts had a tendency to create new forms of tenure that served to secure and strengthen the rights of the land-owning classes. Through a maze of clauses and sub-clauses, greater differentiation was introduced within the nature of ownership. For instance, a class of ex-proprietary tenants was created by the Act of 1901 who could retain the right of occupancy over *sir* land provided they had cultivated it for twelve years. A statutory tenant was entitled to the occupancy of his holding at the same time for ten years, from the date of his admission to his holding or from the date of the last change in his rent.[57] The Tenancy Act of 1926 reduced the number of years needed to acquire occupancy rights; non-

[55]Neale, Economic Change in Rural India, p. 93.
[56]S.N. Jafri, History and Status of Landlords and Tenants in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Agra, 1931), p. 278.
[57]Neale, Economic Change in Rural India, p. 104.

occupancy tenants were made statutory tenants and their tenancy rights and liabilities were withdrawn at the expiry of the lease. Sub-tenants enjoyed no protection except that they were entitled to hold land for one agricultural year.

The net result of these tenancy acts was that they were instrumental in strengthening the institution of zamindari. The decisions of the zamindar in conferring land rights were always final. Thus they were able to deprive kisans of their prescriptive rights to gain occupancy even after the stipulated time. They lived in the greatest fear of *bedakhli* (eviction) and of being drawn into a law suit. *Bedakhli* was possible at any given time. Usually arrears in rent meant outright eviction. The zamindars were never required to go to the court or employ any other legal device to explain their actions. It was only after the political unrest of the 1920s that the zamindars began to make applications to the *tahsildar* for issue of notice on the tenant for payment of arrears and eviction in default. The kisan had to pay arrears within thirty days to the court of the *tahsildar* or contest the claim. It was only after 1923 that the laws were amended. Until then, Act XII of 1881, section 36 of the rent law was quoted in nearly all cases of *bedakhli* which allowed the zamindars to repossess the field on charges of arrears of rent. Even if the kisan had paid rent he or she had no proof as receipts were not given. Zamindars could evict their cultivators-at-will, thus nullifying the original terms of the agreement. Notices of eviction were served without warning and often went against the terms agreed with the kisan and his family when he was given the lease of land.

Revenue administrative records complain how cases in rent litigation and the number of cases for eviction were the highest in Gorakhpur division. This tendency characterised the nature of land tenure in the eastern districts. For

instance, a contemporary account notes that in 1919–20 which were normal years, the number of cases of eviction in Gorakhpur was 20,937.[58] When the Act of 1926 was passed, which slightly limited the zamindars' powers of eviction, over 100,000 suits were filed of which 70,000 were in Gorakhpur alone. If one combs through court records one does not find kisans being charged with *bedakhli* for illegally transferring holdings or abuse of their rights; the common reason given by zamindars for evicting the kisans was arrears in rent, which was often a false pretext for eviction.

"The culture of terror"

The kisans' deep fear of the powers-that-be haunted their existence. The authority of the zamindars remained unchallenged on account of the tacit co-operation of local officials such as the *amin, patwari, sarpanch, thanedar, daroga* right down to the *chowkidar*. Although they were recognised as public servants, they often acted in a private capacity. They formed an informal court of retainers around the zamindar and were rewarded for their services. Although none of these men had a vested right to their father's or uncle's post, custom and convenience gave them at the very least a preferential claim and usually a certain hold upon it.[59] Further, he states that in the book of official rules, it was claimed, wrongly, that the zamindars were no longer responsible for the arrangement of these posts.

Among them the *thanedar*, the *chowkidar* and *patwari* were the most feared by the kisans. Each circle had a *thana* with the *thanedar* and a few *sipahis* (armed retainers), while the *daroga* maintained what many officials knew as "one of the most important records of the *thana*". This was a register called the

[58]Jafri, History and Status, pp. 148–9.
[59]Metcalf, Land, Landlords, p. 271.

village crime notebook which contained "a complete record of crime in the village together with a Historical Sheet [dossier] for all active criminals and convicted persons".[60] The village crime notebook thus enabled the district administration to know of occurrences happening every day in a village by monitoring the lives of ordinary people. According to Freitag, "this surveillance system was quite unique in India"; and she observes that these village records were often influential in determining court convictions.[61]

The village crime notebooks also informed the weekly reports sent by the *thanedars* to the district H.Q. in the form of police weekly intelligence reports by the C.I.D. The villagers lived in dread of the *lal pagrees* (red turbans, i.e. police constables) as they called them; the *daroga* and his subordinates were regarded with deep distrust. Their familiarity with the personnel of the administration and knowledge of government agencies made them appear as evil doers to the low castes in particular.[62] After 1942, all political activists, even those who had been charged with minor offences, were permanently listed in the "dreaded *badmaash*" (evildoer) registers.[63] The surveillance of the thana register grew particularly ferocious after 1942 (when many police stations and post offices were looted and burned). These registers contained additional notes on most villagers and their families with detailed descriptions of their genealogy, occupation and assets. The *chowkidar* had to report regularly to the thanedar on the nature of activities in the villages. Being local men, "[they were familar with the]... knowledge of persons and habits which they possess. Their general mode of life,

[60]Sandria B. Freitag, "Collective crime and authority in north India", in Anand A. Yang (ed.) Crime and Criminality in British India, (Tucson, 1989), p. 153.

[61]*Ibid.*

[62]David Bayley, The Police and Political Development in India (Princeton, 1969).

[63]I examined the village crime notebooks in Tarwa P.S. Azamgarh. A large number of thanas and post offices were attacked here and in some places the records do not exist prior to 1942.

and the form in which they received their renumeration enable them to know all that goes on in the community".[64] Their jobs also included the reporting of births and deaths. The *chowkidars* were hereditary village servants who usually acted on behalf of the local *élite*. They were often rewarded for their services by the zamindar. Often zamindars were responsible for nominating them. This was also the case with the *patwari*.

The kisans had to deal with the *patwari* who was sometimes also the village headman. In their opinion he was vested with an authority that had far reaching consequences in their lives. The following list of documents he maintained indicated the nature of his powers. Some of the more important records were: the *bahi kahata* or grain rent record with the value of the crop, and the *siyaha* with the cash payments by each proprietor and cultivator. By common practice, rents were not paid in cash but in kind, that is, by *batai* or division of the crop or *kankut* (the appraisal of the crop). The other documents which were held by the patwari were the *wasul baqr* or recorded holdings of tenants; *jama kharch* or profit and loss account of the proprietor; *jamabandi* or annual rent roll; *shajra* or village map; *naksha jinswar* or statement of crop area cultivation; *naksha baghel* the statement of groves and orchards; *wajib-ul-arz* or the village administrative paper; and the *rozmancha* or record of daily work. The most important of these documents were the *khewat*, *khasra* and the *khatauni*. The *khasra* was the field map and a statement of field-ownership with the names of the landlords and the names of the tenants holding the field.[65] It also stated the class to which each tenant belonged (occupancy or statutory), the sources of irrigation and the area

[64]Freitag,"Collective crime and authority", quotes a contemporary official source, Police Commisssion report, p. 154.

[65]See map on page 75.

of *rabi*, *kharif* and *zaid* crops grown by the cultivators. The *khewat* contained the names of the proprietors, under proprietors, mortgagers, the proportion of their share in the property and the amount of revenue paid. It stated the legal position of land ownership, tracing descent from the original landowner in whose name the *patta* remained, with a genealogy going back at least *sath pusht* or seven generations. The *khatauni* was a register of holdings with the names of the tenant and the serial number of the fields held by him, the area and the annual rent.

To produce these documents in court the cultivator had to pay the *patwari* a fee which was usually over and above the initially agreed sum. But that was a waste of time and money. In truth, it was not surprising that the zamindar guarded his control over the *patwari* far more than he did the *chowkidar*, who served his interests by often withholding the details of land-holding payments and dispossessing the kisans of their lands.

The *patwari*'s work was supposed to be supervised by the *qanungo*, *amin* and the *tahsildars* but they seldom checked his records. So he often abused his status and power. Cecil Walsh noted in 1929 that in U.P., "errors made by him, deliberately or otherwise, powerfully affected the fortunes of many a cultivator".[66] The low official salary made them dependent on the zamindar who was also often responsible for nominating them. Their true allegiance was never in doubt but this did not seem to bother the district administration.[67] One official estimate by D.L. Drake-Brockman was that there were 28,000 *patwaris* in U.P. and each of them had a minimum of 4,000 *khasra* entries and an large number of *khatas*.[68]

[66]Cited in Neale, Economic Change in Rural India pp. 201–2.

[67]Elizabeth Whitcombe, Agrarian Conditions in Northern India, 1860–1900, vol. I, (London, 1972), pp. 42–43, 247 and 250–51.

[68]Cited in the Proceedings to the Legislative Council of the United Provinces LXIX, 1937,

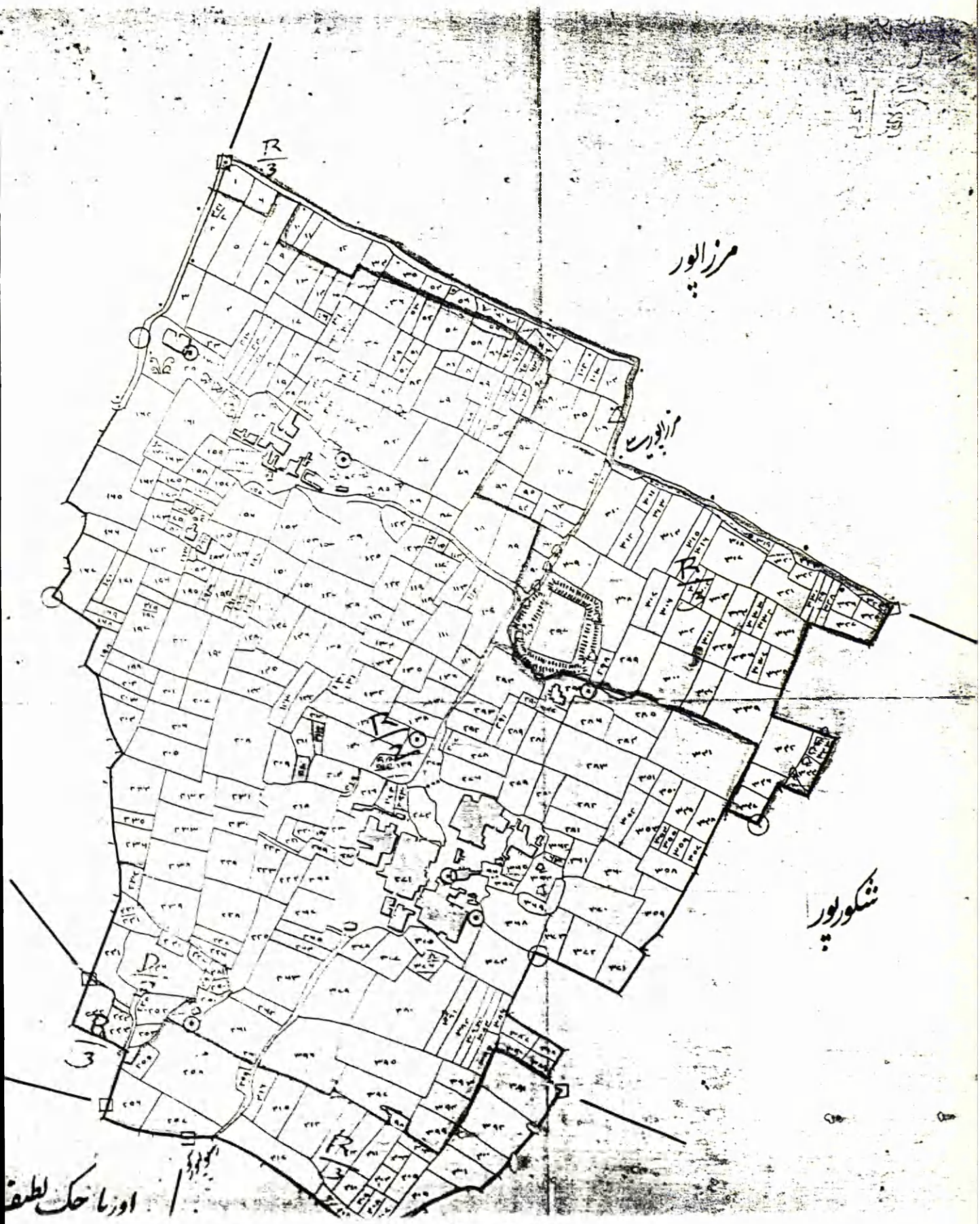

Figure 1.2 The patwari's map

It was common knowledge that the *patwari* was rarely found to keep the maps and records up-to-date, although changes occurred yearly as fields were partitioned or sold, new tenancies created and wastelands brought under cultivation.[69] They had considerable opportunities for extortion and a large proportion of the legal cases occurred on account of incorrect entries in the revenue records. One contemporary observer wrote in 1931 of "a glaring instance of such wilful alteration of papers in Gorakhpur and Azamgarh".[70] A significant number of cultivators were declared *ghair kabiz* (not in possession) although they were in their holdings and cultivating at the time. In Gorakhpur alone about 200,000 such cases were reported. But this was just one of the few instances where the detection of such errors received the notice of the administration.[71] The patwari's official salary was only a fraction of the total income and resources he commanded. On account of his powers he could recover lost lands and enter them in the *jamabandi* under his name or that of a kinsman. In the case of abandoned land he re-let it and appropriated the rent.

Although the problem of *julum* was evident in the "culture of terror", the kisans felt a greater vulnerability in their anxiety for security of tenure. Their chief grievance was the labelling of land as *sir* and *khudkasht*. The *patwaris* actively colluded with the zamindaris in evicting the kisans and appropriating their land. The rights of land ownership and tenancy were tied up with the division of land into two categories: *sir* and *khudkasht*. *Sir* land was home farm land under the direct *jot* (cultivation) of the zamindar. By law, the cultivating rights of the

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pp. 163–4.

[69]Clive Dewey, "*Patwari* and *Chowkidar*: Subordinate officials and the reliability of India's agricultural statistics", in C. Dewey and A.G. Hopkins (eds.), The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India, (London 1968), pp. 280–314.

[70]Jafri, History and Status, p. 187.

[71]*Ibid.*

zamindar were protected even after the transfer of proprietary rights. Following the Act of 1901, all land under the continuous cultivation of the zamindar was declared as *sir*. At the commencement of the Act of 1921 all land which was included under the cultivation of the proprietor or under-proprietor which was recorded as *khudkasht*, was declared as *sir*. Moreover, all khudkasht of the proprietors and under-proprietors which was cultivated for a period of twelve years was declared as *sir*. These laws prevented the actual cultivators from acquiring any rights as no rights could accrue on *sir* land. *Khudkasht* was any land which the zamindar happened to be cultivating at that time. By law, kisans could only acquire rights of ownership on *khudkasht* land.

The issue at stake was that while no ownership rights could be accrued on *sir* lands, the opposite remained true of *khudkasht*. So the zamindars evicted their tenants who were cultivating on *khudkasht* land and claimed all land to be *sir*. One such case was reported in 1919 about Dummariaganj *tahsil* where the kisans who had been cultivating the land for thirty or forty years suddenly found themselves being forced to relinquish their rights.[72] In another estate in Basti, the zamindar had induced the tenants to serve formal notices concerning their land, thus negating any claim they might have over it as cultivators.[73] The case of a village called Narainpur Tewari in Basti district illustrates the character of land ownership. It was largely owned by Tewari Brahmins who declared that 75% of the 271 acres was *sir* and *khudkasht*, 17% was occupancy and the remaining 8% was proprietary.[74]

Further tensions in agrarian society were generated by the methods employed

[72]A.G. Clow, Settlement Report of Basti, 1919, p.14, para 24.
[73]UPRAR, 1909–10, para 64.
[74]UPBECR, II, p. 161.

in the collection of revenue. For instance, the nature of its estimation involved a sharp discrepancy between the official methods of land measurement, soil classification, rent, the price of crops, weights and measures, and local practice. This mismatch of perception brought great misery to the kisans particularly with respect to their livelihood and their values.[75] Land was measured in terms of the *bigha*; the actual measurement of the *bigha* was an arbitary one, inconsistent within a group of villages or even within a village; this was fairly commonplace knowledge.[76] To illustrate this point, the settlement officer of Binayakpur *pargana* in Maharajganj (Gorakhpur) tried to define a *bigha*.[77] He found there was the *dehi* or local *bigha* measurement which was equal to a *lagi* of six cubits or 0.74 of an acre and the *sarkari* or official rate which was equal to 5.5 cubits or 0.62 acre. In the north-western corner the land was cut by water courses and the *parchas* showed that there was the *pakka bigha* which was five *hath* or 0.52 acre. Towards the west of the Mahau river the *mandi bigha* prevailed.[78] This unit was sometimes measured by the cultivator taking ten steps in each direction. In the Jara estate owned by the Tripathis, the *bigha* was measured by *lathis* and by ropes marked with knots. The size of the *bigha* measured here was five and a half *hath* and five *hath* after which it was reduced to a *kaccha bigha* by simple ratios.[79] These two levels of measurement caused considerable consternation between the kisans who were more often than not drawn into tree, plot and

[75]Interview with Bangali Ram, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 14 September 1991.

[76]W.C. Neale, "Land is to Rule" in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.) Land Control and Social Structure in Colonial India (Madison, 1969), p. 5.

[77]G.J.E. Byrne, Assistant Settlement officer, Rent Rate Report, Binayakpur, Maharajganj, 1916, p. 7.

[78]*Ibid.*, p.11. This was the reported conversion table: One standard *bigha* equal to 48 *mandis*, 40 *mandis* equal to one *hath*, 18 *mandis* equal to 0.23 acre etc.

[79]*Ibid.*

boundary conflicts.[80]

Rent was determined by the settlement officer who was instructed to have "some device for gauging the pitch ...after mature deliberation", even though "the general workings of its solution are generally unintelligible to the *ryot*".[81] Rents were usually fixed in circle rates comprising a certain number of villages within a *pargana*. The revenue estimate fixed for each village was sixteen annas.[82]

There was also a marked difference between the real rent and the official or "fictitious" one. Concealment of the real rent was regarded as a serious malpractice but was nevertheless firmly entrenched. The zamindars maintained separate *jamabandis* or rent rolls, one of which was kept for personal use. In one village, the village *thekedar* took a contract for which he paid the zamindar Rs. 250 annually. The recorded rent was Rs. 1,000 but he collected Rs. 2,200. During the early 1930s in the Jara estate, Maharajganj *tahsil*, Bryne noted that the prevailing rate of rent collection was Rs. 4 an acre, although in six villages of the estate for which he obtained the fixed estimate the attested rent was Rs 1.3 to 1.8 an acre.[83] The acquisition of private *jamabandis* confirmed his suspicion of real rents being concealed. These problems were common to U.P. as a whole.[84] Ghosh notes that cash rents showed remarkable stability in Gorakhpur until 1940

[80]Interviews with Manzoor Hussain and Ram Pyare, Basti Land Records room, 19 April 1992. In Basti, the official measurement of the *bigha* was done in *biswas* and *dhur*. One *bigha* was equal to twenty *biswas* and one *biswa* was equal to twenty *dhur* and hence one *bigha* was equal to 420 *dhur*. Here a *bigha* was reckoned to be about 1.2 acres.

[81]C.G. Chevenix-Trench, "The rural community", in E. A. H. Blunt (ed.), Social Service in India, pp. 78–111.

[82]Interview with Tawwaakul Hussain, Basti, 20 April 1992; the retired octogenarian record room keeper in the Basti Collectorate gave me these figures for the 1940s: the value of the anna being equal to twelve pice, one pice being equal to three suuls and one suul was equal to three nahuum.

[83]Bryne, Rent Rate Report, p. 14.

[84]Jayati Ghosh, "Determination of land rent in a non-capitalist agriculture: North India 1860–1930", Modern Asian Studies, 22, 2, 1988, pp. 355–82. However, she is wrong to apply the term non-capitalist agriculture to the economy of this region.

because of widespread concealment, continued and increased eviction of tenants, variation in the size of the local *bigha* and alternative exactions which were not included in the calculation of the rent rate.[85] Thus agrarian statistics during the colonial period have to be treated with the utmost caution.

Sometimes rents were also determined by the legal position of the tenant-cultivator. They were hierarchically ranked—ex-proprietary tenants who owned a fraction of their land, occupancy tenants who had some legal rights, the last two categories being non-occupancy tenants and sharecroppers who were completely at the mercy of the zamindar. However the status of all tenants was calculated to remain insecure because in reality for the kisans, there were only two classes: landowners and tenants-at-will. Those middle-ranking cultivators were marginal to the agrarian structure. In addition to charging illegal rents the zamindars charged *nazarana* or *salami* for admittance to a tenancy. As a rule *nazarana* was exacted as a fee to hold land for a period invariably falling short of the kisan's eligibility to claim occupancy rights. Although this was a common practice, it was particularly rife in the trans-Rapti tract.

Other criteria determined the measurement of revenue and this was determined by the soil and the crops sown. The activity of the kisans was closely monitored for this occasion and the amount was fixed for the next twenty years. The rent to be paid to the government was determined by the size of the field and its distance from the village. It was classified as *gauhan, manjhar* and *palo*. The rent of the field was also determined by the nature of the soil which could vary according to the official estimates. The constitutive elements in the soil content were also subject to official scrutiny. The soil classifiers or the *chaktarashes*, were

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 368.

instructed to divide the villages into soil tracts on the map and the classification of each field was checked by the settlement officer.[86] In some cases there were found to be twelve to fourteen different kinds of soil inside a village![87] All this was difficult to comprehend for the kisan who judged according to the feel of the soil, the crop or crops to be planted, the season and the soil's potency. The rent was also fixed according to the nature of the crop, which was either *dofasli* or *ekfasli*. The rents were usually *dofasli* because more than one crop was planted. The U.P. Banking Enquiry Committee noted the percentage of double cropping was extremely high which accounted for the high density of population, but it seems more likely that it was extreme poverty that forced kisans to reap more than one harvest. The main criterion for determining rent was the productivity of the land. *Gauhan* or the homestead lands were regarded as receiving the most care and were irrigated regularly. It was *domat* or loamy soil, so valuable cash crops like sugarcane were sown here. The middle zone produced wheat and other crops and was also good land. *Palo*, or the outlying lands, lay at a considerable distance from the village site. But in practice rents remained arbitrary. According to the Tenancy law of 1926 the rent could be enhanced on grounds of increased productive powers of the land held by tenant due to fluvial action; other improvements which were not affected by natural agency; tenant's expenses increase in the size of holding by encroachment or alluvian abatement; or because average prices of the produce had fallen and deterioration or land decline in size of holding due to diluvian or public utility purposes.[88]

There was considerable divergence between theory and practice on the leasing

[86]Chevenix-Trench,"The village community", footnote p. 98.
[87]Interview with Tawaakul Hussain, Basti, 26 January 1992.
[88]UPPCC,Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report, (Gurgaon, 1982), pp. 11–12.

of land and this contributed to the insecurity of tenure. The auctioning of land is not mentioned in any of the official records. But in actual practice, the field went to the highest bidder who could become a non-resident zamindar. There was no written agreement and rents were raised or lowered often flouting the terms of the lease. By common practice the initial rent was fixed by private agreement between the zamindar and the tenants usually to the disadvantage of the kisans. If the kisans could not meet the rental demands the law ruled that

> The produce of the land is hypothecated for the rent payable by the tenant in respect of his holding and no other claim on the produce is allowed till rent has been paid...The landlord is entitled to distrain any crop or agricultural product standing ungathered on the holding or any other crop or agricultural product grown on the holding that has been reaped and deposited on the holding.[89]

Furthermore the property could be sold by auction or confiscated by the zamindar. The law allowed the zamindar to make the tenant liable to pay interest if arrears on rent were not paid on the due date.

Although the indebtedness of the kisans was clearly noticeable, as early as the 1900s the sympathy of the administration was clearly on the side of the ruling *élite*. The revenue officer in Basti, Mr Morgan, noted that coercive processes "reflect the difficulty of rent collection".[90] He noted that the system of collection was "to send around not only the *chaprasis* but a swain of their brothers and relatives" who lived off the zamindari, stating that these "coercive processes" were necessary. He even assisted the zamindars to regularise eviction in court without

[89] *Ibid.*, p.12.
[90] UPRAR, 1902–3, p. 9.

delay. The number of such cases in Gorakhpur division increased from 55,000 to 81,000 in 1906–7. There were a number of cases for appeal and the reports commented on "the litigiousness of the people", blaming them for creating their miseries. However, it was often the nature of land revenue administration that forced such litigiousness on the kisans.

Cash rents were insisted upon, but failing that the former practice of collecting grain rents was widely practised. There were many kinds of payment based on *batai* or division of the crops on the *khaliyan*. Having personally met all the costs of cultivation, threshing and winnowing, a substantial portion of the kisan's crop was given away as rent. The zamindar and his henchmen maintained differential rent rates which determined how much of a share per *maund* of grain they would receive: measurements varied and were local in character. In one recorded instance, a prevailing measurement of *batai* during the 1920s was *nisfi* or twenty *seers*, *nauna* or seventeen-and-a-half seers, *tiahara siwars* or sixteen and a half *seers*, *puchkoo* or sixteen and half *chhataaks*, *sarh tihare chah bara* or twelve and eight *chhataks* and *chaubara pansari* or eleven *seers* and four *chhataks*.[91] Often other members of the village *élite* arrived to claim their share or *hissa* of the crop like the *sarpanch, patwari* and the *thanedar*.

The notorious exactions

In addition to extortion of rent, the zamindars enforced *abwabs* (exactions) by claiming extensive "feudal" privileges and duties.[92] These *abwabs* were demanded whenever the zamindar engaged in any form of social or family activity and had

[91]Jafri, History and Status, pp. 344–5.

[92]Kapil Kumar, Peasants in Revolt: Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh (1886–1922) (Delhi, 1982), gives a detailed account of such illegal levies.

to incur expenditure. These were numerous and "grew more and more ingenious year by year".[93] It was an arbitary exaction and with such an enormous disparity of power between the rural *élite* and the cultivators, the latter were completely at the mercy of the former.

The amount charged to each cultivator varied from two annas to four rupees or more. The commonly found levies were *ghorawan* (purchase of a horse), *hathiana* (purchase of an elephant), *motorowan* (purchase of a car), *tehbazaari* (for a village fair), *pujahi*(for conducting a religious ceremony), *baagawan* (to plant an orchard), *purohiti* (to pay the pandit), if the zamindar had a stomach ache he charged *peetpirawan*, for a daughter's engagement *biahu* or *janamawan* for the birth of a child, etc. If he passed through a village he charged *nazar daura*and if he was accompanied by a musical instrument he charged *gramaponning*.[94] These exactions varied in each zamindari, being more numerous in some than in others. There were some practices that were not mentioned casually, such as *kanyadan*, meaning in this case that the kisan was forced by the zamindar to submit his daughter or daughters for the zamindar's sexual gratification.[95]

Shibbanlal Saxena noted that during the 1930s there were 53 kinds of exactions found in Maharajganj tahsil.[96] Sheetal Tripathi informed me that there were over 75 exactions in Shorhatgarh during the late 1920s. During festivals like Id, Dusshera, Holi and Diwali, kisans were charged *nazar*. The official visits by the bigwigs like the Commisioner or Deputy Commisioner entailed payment by the kisans of *kamisharwan* or *dipty kamishrawan*. When Babu Shivpati Singh invited the Governor in February 1935, he exacted *gowrawan* and *latiers* from

[93]Clow, Basti Settlement Report, 1919, p. 14.
[94]Jafri, History and Status,p. 131.
[95]Interview with Parbi, Sonmara village, Azamgarh, 18 January 1992.
[96]Shibbanlal Saxena, Election pamphlet, 1980, p. 7.

the kisans. The kisans had been made to work for several weeks to clear the roads. On the appointed night they had to stand on both sides of the road with a burning torch, in the bitter cold, to welcome the carriage of the Governor who remarked that the road rivalled Hazrat Ganj in Lucknow.[97] There were many other illegal exactions to which the kisans were subjected; they were of varying proportions ranging from *salami* to *nazarana,* and other kinds of concealed rents. Hence the legal rents remained constantly in arrears. The kisans were never given receipts for the rents, and most of the time all payments had to go towards liquidating the concealed rents. This situation was to go from bad to worse from the 1920s to the early 1930s. In September 1931, the Agrarian Distress Committee Report noted:

> It is unfortunately a fact that unauthorised exactions of various sorts are made on a large scale, receipts are not given, in many villages the amounts in excess of the recorded rent are also realised, especially in the eastern districts, and the general feeling among the zamindars is that the tenant is none the worse for the beating that may be administered to him so long as his limbs are not broken.[98]

Further illustrations of *julum* were evident from the practice of *begar* (forced labour), and *hari* (free provision of resources).[99] A kisan had to pay the zamindar for tying a new stake in the ground for his own cattle and for building a room on his land. He had to provide the zamindars' animals with *bhusa, karbi* and *payal* whether or not they were allowed to graze their own animals in the pasture; they took turns serving the zamindar and his household two or three times each week,

[97]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.
[98]UPPCC, Agrarian Distress Committee Report,(Delhi, 1982) p. 35.
[99]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.

attending to domestic and field tasks. *Hari* and *begar* were found in almost every zamindari village. A contemporary observation, dated 1931, notes that one of the zamindars expected gifts from the cultivators according to their occupation: a Chamar had to give his master two pairs of shoes, a Gaderiya a blanket, the Pasi a goat, a Kahar one maund of *singhara* (water chestnuts); the others like the Teli, the Bharbhuja, and the Julaha were to pay cash sums of twelve annas to a rupee.[100]

To the kisans *hari* and *begar* meant the most oppressive form of life bondage whereby every member of the kisan's family had to be prepared to serve the zamindar or his household in every possible way. Both men and women were forced to comply—if any of them resisted, brutal punishment was inevitable. The men were mercilessly beaten and the women were sexually abused. If they were spotted working in the fields (or in the village going about their duties) and summoned by the zamindar, or his henchmen, they had to acquiesce immediately. It did not matter even if a kisan was carrying the corpse of his dead son to the cremation ground; he would simply have to leave it on the wayside and attend to the orders of the zamindar.[101] Kisans had to use their own animals to plough the zamindars' fields, and complete the tasks of the malik or Raja saheb before being able to attend to more pressing matters in their own households or work in their own fields. They were thus extremely overworked and had very little time of their own. While they worked for the zamindar, they were not provided with any food or even given a drink of water. They had to go whenever they were summoned, and at any given time, weather or season, they were made to run all kinds of errands. Sometimes in the middle of the night at the end of a long and

[100]Jafri, History and Status, p. 132.
[101]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.

tiring day, they were asked to trudge many miles through the biting cold (during winter) and rain to deliver a message to another zamindar. It was a hard life with no respite from labour, and men, women and children suffered enormous misery.

It was difficult for others to understand the searing pain that crushed the very hope of existence. For instance, a popular saying ran thus: "Ya dukh janey dukhiya, ya dukhiya ki maaii".[102]

The kisans believed:

> "Watan ke patan ki jadi bimariyan hai, buri unsab mey sey jhamindariyan hai".[103]

("There were many kinds of illness the country had to face but the worst kind was zamindari rule.").

There was a deep fear of retribution, and this was one of the main reasons why the cultivators were unable to take action against the injustice meted out to them. And where could they go for justice anyway ? Very often one or other of the big zamindars occupied the position of an Honorary Judge or Magistrate. In any case the law was on the side of "their masters" and a kisan had very little hope of representing his or her case favourably.

Litigation was a very expensive matter and the kisans could not dream of taking such a step lightly. These cases involved many journeys to and fro and a constant spending of cash income of which they had very little. They rarely initiated prosecution and were usually taken to court by the zamindars. A journey to the court was a torment which one *neta* described thus: several loans were required for any legal venture against the zamindar and the kisans would have

[102] "Only a grief-stricken person understands sorrow, and such sorrow can only be felt by the mother of the grief-stricken individual."
[103] Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.

to journey to the nearest *tahsil* court (usually by foot) to represent his or her case. Young women never travelled unaccompanied, while men usually did to save money. The trip usually entailed a long trek from the village, a distance of eighty miles or more. They would be tired by the time they reached the *tahsil*. The moment a villager was spotted heading in the direction of the court he was pestered by several petty *mukhtars* who had touts posted on the roads. He became a victim of their intrigues, and not knowing better, he did whatever they bade him and was soon pauperised, never being certain whether his petition had reached even the judge.[104] Not only did the kisans fear the wrath of the zamindars, but the very futility of going to the court drove them to despair.[105]

Another source of anxiety was caused by usury, loans and indebtedness. As a custom, the kisans were suspicious of money and preferred to pay and receive in kind. In general, the land laws and taxes tended to aggravate rather than lessen the insecurity of the kisans.[106] They merely served to encourage an institution of informal or legal bondage by nurturing the growth of usury and indebtedness. Firstly, the government insisted on cash rents, and secondly the rental demands were made in March (Chaiti) when the kisan was simply not in a position to pay rent. It was a time when the kisans primarily sought loans to meet rental demands and for buying seed. The settlement officer in Basti commented on the indebtedness of the kisans residing in Mehandawal, Bakhira and Utrawal *tappas*:

> He is in the habit of borrowing money for seed, for rent, even for subsistence. All loans carry 25% and the interest forms a first charge

[104]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 30 September 1991.
[105]Royal Commission of Agriculture, VII, (Calcutta, 1929), Minutes 40,1005 and 40,1006
[106]Amiya K. Bagchi, "Land laws, property rights and peasant insecurity in colonial India", Journal of Peasant Studies, 20, 1, 1992, pp. 1–49.

> on the ensuing crop, in many cases a recurring charge on every crop... This was usually the case and high debts were commuted to cash interest, enhancing the burden for the following years.[107]

The official records speak of the village *mahajan*. In Basti, they note that although there were a few *banias* there were a few money lenders who could be classified as *mahajans*. It states that the creditor was usually the zamindar who had a tendency to keep the tenant in arrears with rent. The nature of indebtedness depended on the rate of nazarana which was charged. In the terai, the rate varied from 10% to 15%. Sometimes the creditor entered a much higher sum than that which had been executed in the particular deed. If the deed had been recorded for Rs 200, the borrower might receive only half the sum.[108] In many cases the kisans borrowed from a number of sources, often travelling to neighbouring villages so that they could retain their holdings. Occasionally, the kisans borrowed from the more prosperous sections of the tenantry who were either Kurmis or Koeris. This could prove dangerous. In two villages in Basti district these tenant moneylenders accounted for 38% of the debts which amounted to Rs. 5000, and they tried to secure the debtor's fields for themselves.[109]

The Banking Enquiry Commission of 1931 indicated that another source of credit was the "peripatetic moneylenders". These were gangs of wandering usurers from neighbouring Bihar, called *Harhias*, who lent money in small sums and traded cattle. The usual rate of interest was $37\frac{1}{2}\%$ for ten months. If the payment was delayed their habit was to picket the house until the debtor satis-

[107]Cited in Shahid Amin, Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India (Delhi, 1989), p. 79.

[108]UPBECR, IV, p. 388.

[109]*Ibid.*, I, p. 56. Tenant moneylenders were said to account for nearly 14% of the debt in the entire province.

fied them. Another group of moneylenders were the *Kabuli* who practised the *qistbandi* system whereby four rupees or multiples of four was advanced at seed times and six rupees was realised at harvest. If the money was not paid at harvest time they charged interest at the rate of two paise per day.

Due to their very low cash income, the kisans sought short-term loans. It was not easy to be granted a loan. Their desperate condition made them rather vulnerable victims of circumstance. For every kind of loan a *salami* was demanded. They had to put thumb impressions for the sum borrowed although they were never quite certain of the amount recorded on paper. Sometimes they had to put an eight anna stamp on the papers and were charged a half yearly compound interest of 25%. At the end of three years the debtor had to pay at least four times the amount borrowed.[110]

Grain loans (*bisar*) were generally required during the latter half of Chaiti (or early April). The seeds that were borrowed were repayable at the next *Rabi* harvest in grain. The rate of interest, or *deorha*, was $37\frac{1}{2}\%$ or 25%.[111] A tenant who could not pay his grain loan was unable to retain possession of his grain reserves or meet rental demands. Thus kisans "seldom confined themselves to one bisaria. They had to keep up a connection with several more to ensure a steady supply ...".[112] The second kind of loan was *potai* which meant a more or less permanent enhancement of 25% of the kisan's recorded rent.

The extent of indebtedness was difficult to measure, but it is clear that the bulk of the debt occurred on account of rent. It was recorded that almost 75% of the tenants were indebted in one estate in Basti.[113] However, one kisan leader

[110] *Ibid.*, II, p. 167.
[111] *Ibid.*, IV, p. 425.
[112] *Ibid.*, p. 387.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 388–9

Table 1.4: Sample of a cultivator's budget, Sripalpur village, Basti District, 1931[a]

Rent	44%
Plough and cattle purchase	17%
Repayment of earlier debt	10%
Subsistence	7.5%
Marriage and social functions	5.5%
Seed	4.5%
Land mortgage	4%
Trade	3%
Bribes to local officials	2.5%
Litigation	2%
Total	100%

[a]UPBECR, II, p. 188.

indicated that even at the best of times, nearly all the cultivators were indebted and particularly those who had no rights on land.[114] The estimate in table 1.4 given by the zamindar of Sripalpur village in Basti district indicates the distribution of debt incurred by an average kisan household.

That elixir of life: *Gur*

Another effect of zamindari practices was to encourage cash-crop farming. The production of staple food crops, particularly coarse kharif staples, was downgraded in favour of commercial crops. This was detrimental for the kisans. With the setting up of sugar mills, cash crop farming of sugarcane was taken up by the kisans as it promised a lucrative income. It also created a structure within the rural sector which was exploitative and obstructive: the effect was to serve the interests of the zamindars. Between 1930 and 1937, the number of sugar mills had quintupled and the capital subscribed to the industry had quadrupled.[115]

[114]Interview with Prakash Chandra Pandey, Basti, 24 December 1991.
[115]Amin, Sugarcane and Sugar, p. 244.

Some of the big zamindars were closely associated with the mills and encouraged cane cultivation. Large areas of the zamindari estates, particularly the richly forested Maharajganj *tahsil*, were deforested for cane cultivation. In Pharenda, a sugar-mill was opened shortly after deforestation. The zamindars were actively engaged in coercing the kisans to sell their cane to the favoured mill and prevented them from using the *kolhus*.[116] During the 1930s, the zamindars of Basti and Gorakhpur often sent their *lathaits* to remove forcibly the *kolhus* of the kisans who preferred to press their own cane. This was particularly resented because *gur* provided the chief and usually the only source of nourishment, and the kisans usually sustained themselves by drinking *shira*.[117]

The kisans were not allowed to sell their cane without obtaining a pass or receipt from the mill-owners. Usually the zamindars secured the passes in their names and got the carts of cane weighed in their own names by a *taula* who was usually in the pay of the zamindar. The weighing scales were often "fixed" and under-weighing was not uncommon. The *taula* often claimed a portion of the crop as payment. So in the end the amount received by the cultivator (having passed through many hands) was almost negligible. The sugar-mills gave the kisans "a very raw deal".[118] When there was overproduction of cane these mill-owners were able to tighten their grip over the kisans. On account of surplus production they would refuse to buy the cane although the carts had arrived at the gates of the mill. Then they haggled about prices and undercut the value of

[116]Interview with Thakur Singhasan Singh, Gorakhpur, 19 March 1992.

[117]Interview with Vijaypal Chamar, 10 February 1992, who said that when it became difficult to make *gur* a very inferior and cheap quality was imported from Bareilly that was locally consumed and the kisans said the acid content in it was so high that their excreta burnt the ground.

[118]Amin, Sugarcane and Sugar, Chapter II and III, also interview with Bangali Ram, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 14 September 1991.

the crop. In nearly all cases the kisans could not afford to wait for money and seek a good price for the crops, particularly sugarcane whose stalk weight would diminish if it was left to dry: they sold it as quickly as they could. In the case of other crops, they were exploited by the buyer who assessed the crop and settled his own price with the cultivator. It was not uncommon to find a kisan selling his standing crops to the zamindar or his agents to meet their insistent demands for payment.

Mill-owners often kept the kisans waiting for days before paying them. This was a pathetic sight, as one official eye-witness described the long queue of impoverished cane-growers waiting outside the mill with their carts. The muddy, waterlogged roads were filled with carts for three or four days. Often the wheels of the carts got stuck in the mud, and it was difficult to get them moving.[119] A kisan recalled the death of his elder brother on one such occasion.[120] Jethu had been a cart driver who had gone to deliver the cane to the mill in the winter of 1934. Along with the other cart drivers he had to sleep under the cart with only a *gamcha* (loin cloth). On account of the cold, he, and two other kisans were found dead the following morning. There was no formal enquiry and their deaths were blamed on *bokhar* (fever). The plight of the oxen, which had to stand outside with thirty to forty maunds of cane weighing down on them, also did not attract the concern of the authorities. Every kisan was aware that the mills had been set up with a capital of several crores, but in spite of that the mill-owners never bothered to provide shelter for them or their animals.

All these turbulent strains within rural society generated tensions against

[119]Personal communication from Yezdi D. Gundevia who was the sub-divisional magistrate in Basti and Gorakhpur during 1937–39.

[120]Interview with Bangali Ram, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 14 September 1991.

official and zamindari authority. The meanings of *julum* were thus closely tied with the unfairness of land tenure and the inequalities it generated. Hence the struggle for *milkiyat* or outright ownership of land rights began with the demand for *maurausi* or cultivating rights by the kisans. There was a general feeling of moral outrage which the kisans used to express by the term *julum*.

A moral economy of the peasants?

In recent years, popular revolts have been sometimes conceptualised by the term moral economy. James Scott argues that fear of dearth and the quest for a secure subsistence were the central themes in peasant politics.[121] In south-east Asia, the economic and political transformations brought by colonial rule systematically violated the traditional moral codes and peasants were deprived of many of their basic resources such as easy access to cultivable land, use of forests and other natural resources; colonial land taxes were high and cash payments forced them to grow for the market. Scott emphasises that such reciprocity of exchange made certain moral obligations incumbent on both classes, the peasants providing agricultural produce while the landlord was expected to reciprocate with protection services. However, the breakdown of tradition and customary practices created a sense of deprivation among the pesantry. Crucial to the notion of moral economy is the impact of capitalism. The nature of capitalist penetration in the countryside led to the loss of subsistence resulting in the breakdown of traditional social relationships between the landowners and the peasantry. The abolition of customary *zakat* (charity loans) and the introduction of mechanisation by the government created conditions for rebellions. Thus Scott stresses that the viola-

[121]James C. Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South-East Asia, (New Haven, 1976), p. 8.

tion of the norms of reciprocity and custom, destroyed by colonial rule led to a feeling of moral outrage, and caused the peasantry to revolt in south-east Asia during the 1920s and the 1930s.

Scott's moral economy thesis has certain limitations. Scott's traditional society seems to be a hierarchical society governed by a paternalism which is seemingly unchanging and self-sufficient, reminiscent of Wittfogel's "oriental despotism",[122] where peasants were used to hand-outs during times of natural crises and landlords felt socially accountable and performed various paternalistic obligations on the behalf of the peasantry. These limitations, notwitstanding, is the term moral economy a useful concept in examining peasant resistance in Asia? Hardiman argues against it. He sees it is as somewhat simplistic to argue that the peasants' sense of what was just made them judge their oppressors as morally responsible for their predicament, and mobilised them to revolt for their subsistence and customary rights.[123] The evidence in this thesis supports Hardiman's arguments. The movements against *julum* happened not because the kisans felt that customs had been violated, making it incumbent for them to demand their rights, but rather it was the conjuncture of various circumstances, (political rather than moral or just economic) which made them believe they could overthrow the shackles of their long-standing oppression.

This is not to suggest that the peasants in south-east Asia or the kisans of U.P. did not have clearly defined notions of social justice but reciprocity is another issue altogether. For instance, in eastern U.P., the kisans' notions of what was just and unjust constituted their definition of what was an acceptable social

[122]Karl A. Wittfogel, Oriental Despotism (New Haven, 1957).
[123]David Hardiman, "The Bhils and Sahukars of eastern Gujarat", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, V, (Delhi, 1987), pp. 44–50.

order where ownership of land was an important component. They recognised that there was a hierarchical structure of power in society and were conscious that they were being exploited: they cultivated the land and wanted to enjoy the fruits of their labour but they were paid a pittance, if at all. So a sense of outrage prevailed. Undoubtedly, the kisans were concerned with their immediate oppressors. Although they had no immediate expectations that the ideal world would be realised, they longed for it to happen. They wanted security of tenure, permanent ownership of land and freedom from hunger, illness and grinding poverty: it was more the vision of a model society (not just the demand for subsistence), rather than a moral economy that caused them to revolt.

To understand popular perceptions and politics, it is necessary to dwell on not just how the the kisans experienced the hierarchy of power over them, but also how they understood and interpreted it on a moral and philosophical level. They said that while they could cope with the *julum* of nature they resented the *julum* of the zamindars. They took refuge by symbolically withdrawing into their own culture exercising the freedom to define it with its own realms of power and interest. The kisans' world-view in relation to these themes will be examined in the next section.

Defining Being: the social construction of reality

How did the kisans define their reality? It was an outcome of the way kisans were compelled to react to the region in which they lived. The metaphors used by kisans for constructing their livelihood reflected local models of knowing: they were not mere phrases or images and attitudes, but served to inscribe and articulate practical responses to everyday situations. One must be conscious that

these cultural constructions should not be treated as a common psyche, because different individuals reacted differently to various experiences in the past. These perceptions of knowledge were a powerful mixture of local tradition and the social experience of individual men and women who tilled the land. Particular courses of action and thought were partially influenced by propinquity of residence and the common use of natural resources: thereby the past and future of people were bound together.[124]

These customs and other practices were not just based on a whole set of predispositions.[125] Many of the villagers in this region identified themselves as *purbis* and only spoke Bhojpuri. They recognised each other by their *boli* (dialect), *biradari* (extended family) and *gaon* (village). The boundaries of each village were marked by fields, wells, ponds or groves. One kisan described the sentiments for his village:

> Yaeha gaonva ki chatta, chan ke khet,
>
> Tal ka nirman pani hai,
>
> Prakriti ki nayi javani hai.[126]

("The beauty and serenity of my village and the gentle movement of the paddy fields symbolises the rebirth of nature.")

It is possible to say that while members of a society shared a broad set of cultural assumptions, they also possessed diverse interpretations of reality. The kisans repeatedly emphasised that seeking a charter of common observances was not correct because circumstances determined actions and social behaviour dif-

[124]Interview with Paras Nath Mishra, Lucknow, 17 August 1991.
[125]Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, (Cambridge, 1977).
[126]Interview with Ram Singh, Chilhia village, Shorhatgarh, 6 March 1992.

fered from village to village. They said that a particular course of action could not be predicted, but they agreed that there was a common orientation which preceded thought and action.

There is a popular saying:

Das kos par pani badal

Bees kos par bani

("The taste of water changes every ten miles and the use of language after twenty miles.") This was how they defined space. They found official territorial divisions quite arbitary and tended to omit such boundaries as shown in the map drawn by a kisan.[127]

How did the kisans interact with their natural environment? In general, they evinced the need to explore the personal meanings and the practical content of "mental maps" and landscape imagery in describing their lives. They believed that the destiny of the human being was not final and irreducible: there was a need to annul and transcend the human condition by speaking not only of freedom and deliverance, but also of creation.[128] There is much truth in the observation that "across this landscape run pathways and boundaries of the mind";[129] they were moving among these scenes not as "trespassers" but as participants in a steadily moving life which was theirs by habitual right: a life which went forward day after day, allowing them to partake in its process of renewal, influencing their sense of time and space.[130] Eliade's observation can be applied to the

[127]See map on page 99.

[128]Mircea Eliade, The Myth, pp. 158–9.

[129]Piers Vitebsky, "Landscape and self-determination among the Eveny: The political environment of Siberian reindeer herders today", in Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin (eds.), Bush Base: Forest Farm; Culture, Environment and Development, (London, 1992.), p. 226.

[130]Interview with Bangali Ram, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 14 September 1991.

THE BHOJPURI-SPEAKING AREA

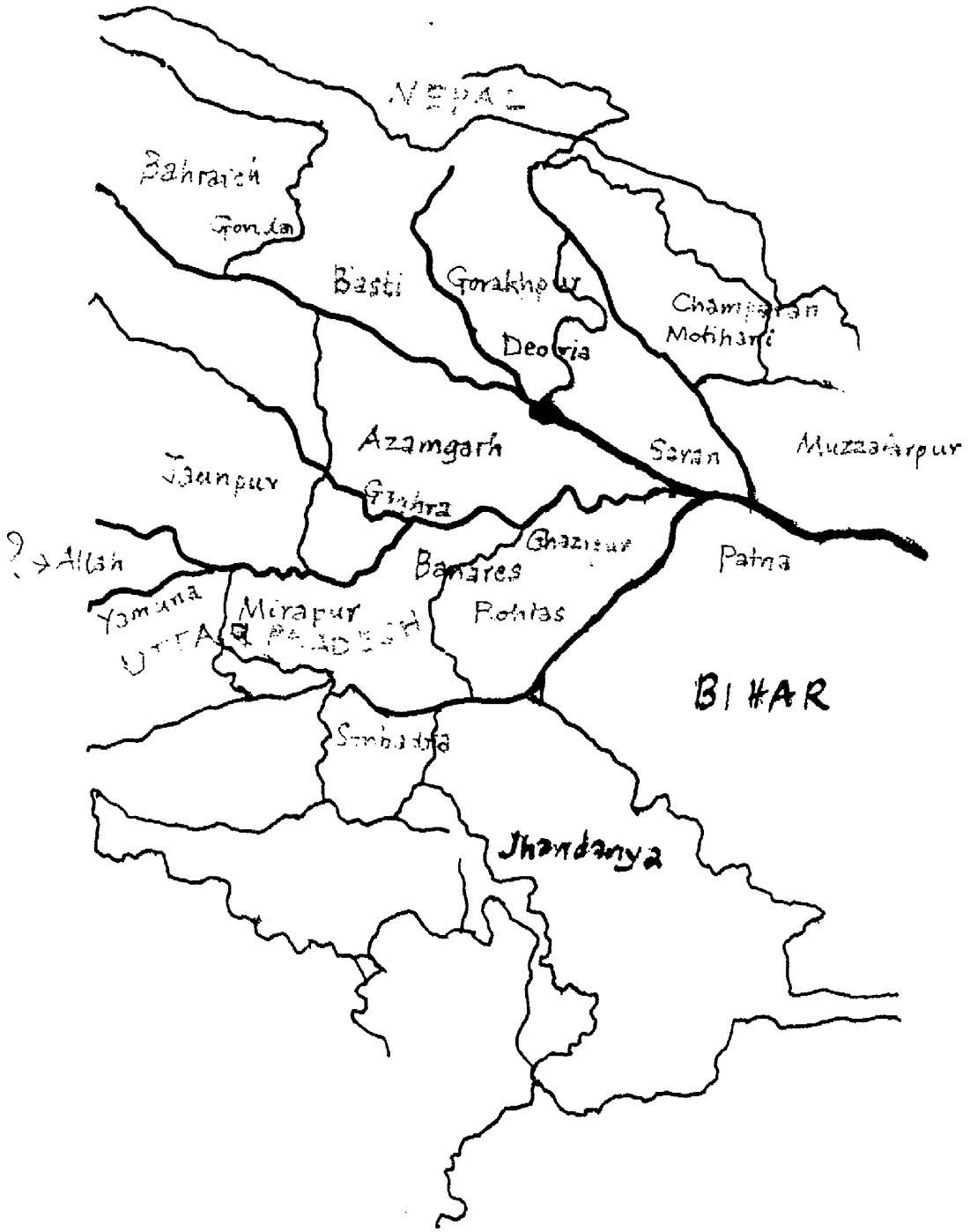

Figure 2.3 The Kisan's map.

kisans: "the historical truth" almost never had to do with definite events and persons;[131] to the kisans customs, beliefs and the land influenced their terms of reference. The kisans defined their world in terms of the land, soils, trees, ponds, wells, lakes and the rivers, for which they had their own names according to their locally perceived character. Several groups of kisans I met suggested in conversation that they believed their surroundings had been one of the most potent influences which formed and governed their lives, informing their hopes and fears. For instance, they were apprehensive of the *katav* or dangerous curves of the rivers Rapti, Kuano, Ami, Tonns, Ghagra and the Saryu which made possible the greatest devastation during the floods.

It is important to illustrate what constituted knowledge about the kisans' natural environment, and to examine how their world-view informed their politics and their understanding of *julum*. An individual's life began by taking in the environment as the immediate source of nourishment and eventually it became the basis of a philosophy, the very conditioning of the spirit. There have always been elaborate taboos, proverbs and couplets that have informed social behaviour and governed social production. This is why folk distinctions and evaluations of traditional agriculture, land usage and forest usage assume such profound significance. Kisans did not recognise a distinction between the divine and other forms: to them rocks, stones, plants, trees, animals, ants and snakes were endowed with some sort of spirit in them which was always active. The disposition of these spirits determined whether they were benevolent or malevolent. Plants, trees, animals and their own human interactions were perceived as part of a single spiritual and moral regenerative system. To them it was a powerful cosmology

[131]Eliade, The Myth, p. 43.

which enabled psychic rapport with the natural and the supernatural alike. The kisans believed that these natural processes furnished clues about the present and the future to which they were keenly responsive. The behaviour of the animals, plants, movements of the clouds and the colour of the sky were seriously and continuously observed. When clouds gathered from the west, east and the south, the kisans feared that their threshing field would be ruined by water. From the murmuring and chattering of the river they could predict the temperature of the day. When mangoes fell off the trees on account of the wind and the heat, it was a signal to complete the planting of the *kharif*. The eastern winds were always welcome and brought the prospect of fertility. The east was an auspicious direction whilst the south usually spelt death.

Further, kisans believed that certain trees were sacred, and the wood from them could not be used for ordinary purposes. For example, a frequent practice (in lieu of legal proceedings) in English-owned estates was to put rice on a peepal leaf and ask the suspect to chew it. If the leaf remained dry then the suspect was declared guilty. The trees like peepal, bel (wood-apple), banyan or bargad and neem were the abode of divine beings and usually these trees provided a shrine for a godling or a venue for villagers to rest or gather under for social activities like sharing tobacco for a smoke, gossiping and gambling. Grass plants like *kusa, daaba*, and *dubb* had religious significance. The most important shrub was the *tulsi* whose roots were supposed to contain the sacred places of pilgrimage, in whose centre were present all deities and whose upper branches contained the knowledge of the Vedas: only the upper-castes were allowed to touch the plant.

There was a deeply embedded resistance on the part of the kisans towards any attempt to go against nature, as illustrated by the following metaphorical

poem which records the conversation of a cultivator with a crop of millet.

Oii bajra! Dhire dhire tey mana,

Dhire sab kuch hoye

Mali seendhe sao ghade,

Ritu aye phal hoye.

("Oh crop of millet, grow slowly!, for everything in nature must take its own course. When the cultivator has irrigated it with a hundred pots of water, then the crop will bear fruit with the coming of the season".)

The tendency was to value foresight rather than forecasting. The produce was renewable within the space of a year so kisans usually aimed for the "forseeable" future and were suspicious of a mediated, abstract future based on rational or scientific calculations. The common practice was to grasp intuitively the whole process of life, and great value was placed on the accumulated experience which constituted tradition or *parampara*. People believed they had no other possibility of survival apart from working on or by the land. This verse echoes a popular sentiment on land:

Tulsi Ramahin yon bhajyo jeon kisan ki reeti, dam changure rin ghano
lohum khat se priye.

("Just as Tulsidas devoted his entire life to reciting the Ramayana, likewise the kisan his land. Although the rent is four-fold, and the debt insurmountable the kisan still treasures his field".)

There was a heritage of wisdom based on intuition gained from living on the land and drawing strength from it. Pierre Bourdieu's observation on the Algerian peasantry can be applied here.

> [Land] haunts these people's thinking. It governs their conduct, orients their opinions, inspires their emotions. And yet it often escapes explicit consciousness and systematic statement. It is the invisible centre around which social behaviour revolves, the virtual vanishing point of the sub-proletarian world-view.[132]

Another ingrained belief was the importance of showing respect to "mother nature, the creator" The earth was not to be defiled by wearing shoes while working on it because after all it was as sacred as the produce of the land. It was wrong to work in the fields at night, "not just because the evil spirits hovered but also because mother earth needed to remain undisturbed; the silence was important for her vitality."[133] The strength of the earth was sustained by divine blessing which came from the rain. The earth was weakened each year but the powers of nature renewed her strength. So with every new year "she recovered her original sanctity and powers of procreation".[134] The length of a farming year and its produce was again in their words, "Bhavani ki maya hai" ("the magic of goddess Bhavani"). Some female animals were regarded as incarnations of the goddess of strength. For instance, *Kali gai* or black cows were particularly valued for they were regarded as "incarnations of Kali mai" (mother Kali); the villagers believed misfortune would befall one who crossed the path of a black cow or aroused her temper. The milk of these cows was valued as a delicacy and believed to be more nutritious than ordinary milk.

[132]Pierre Bourdieu, Algeria 1960, pp. 56–7.
[133]Interview with Parbi, Sonmara village, Azamgarh, 18 January 1992.
[134]Interview with Ramu Kurmi, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 15 September 1991.

Time and work

How did these cosmological and cultural values translate into the daily lives of the kisans? Time was not measured in the linear sense or by a defined system of calibration. The kisans followed the lunar calendar with solar constraints. It is important to remember that the villagers did not perceive time or space as homogeneous. There were intervals of sacred time for social duties, festivals and fairs, and ordinary time for agricultural activities relating to the *fasal* (crop). By observing sacred time periods, the kisans believed that they became more personally involved with the divine, and thereby the sacred dimension of life could be recovered, and they would be blessed with some good fortune. These time phases were symbolised by activities which complemented each other. Each lunar month was divided into a dark half and a bright half based on the phases of the moon. There were auspicious times for important beginnings: the first ploughing of the fields, sowing of the crops, building a hut. This was also the time for engagements, marriages, lawsuits and other personal duties. They were regarded as being directed by distinct lunar asterisms or *nakhats* concurring with solar time. These durations of time governed human activity; agricultural tasks could only start on a particular *nakhat* each season; they also determined the crops to be planted. Take, for instance, these popular beliefs:

> Tapai nakhat mrigsara joe, Tab barkha puran jag hoe.[135]

("If the weather is hot in *Mrig*, a copious and regular rainy season is looked for.")

[135]William Crooke, A Glossary of North Indian Peasant Life, edited, with an introduction, notes and appendices by Shahid Amin, (Delhi, 1989), Appendix C, p. 190. These verses and translations are taken from this book. He also recorded that Phagun, Chait, Baisakh and Jeth were the hot months; the wet months were Asarh, Sawan, Bhadon, Kuar; the cold months were Katik, Agahan, Pus and Magh.

Pukh, puran bas bowe dhan, Magha sarekha kheti an

("Sow paddy in *Pukh* and *Puranbas* but in *Magha* sow miscellaneously.")

Another verse runs thus:

Ardara dhan puranbas paiya, ga kisan jo boe chiraiya

("Paddy sown in *Aradhra* turns in to plenty, but sown in *Puran bas* it turns to chaff and sown in *Chiraiya* it turns to nothing.")

These notions of time have an important bearing on popular consciousness. It is not surprising that on being questioned by perplexed colonial authorities in the district courts, the kisans almost always were unable to recollect the English date, month or time.[136] Further, these popular sayings agricultural practices reveal that the kisans had a distinct and separate culture governed by folk wisdom. In stark contrast with the linear or official reading of time, in everyday life, the cyclical readings of time by the kisans were interwoven but never overlapping: they combined agricultural tasks, ceremonies and festivals in reciprocal alternation and governed gender relations. Control and power were exercised by both men and women and cannot be judged merely within the "politics of social relations": they extended beyond the social and were actively influenced by the cosmological and transcendental tradition.[137] Men and women controlled various spheres and each sex exercised different kinds of power over the other, as will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The nature of agricultural work was not always gendered; it was dependent on the availability of home labour. If the men were busy working in the zamindar's

[136]Evidence from Sessions Trial 45, 1943, Azamgarh District Court makes this point.

[137]Annette Weiner, Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange, (Austin, 1976), p. 12.

field, the women did their tasks and vice versa. It is not possible to separate distinctly the male and female domains in agricultural work among ordinary kisans. Apart from ploughing which was usually a male preserve, the women worked harder than the men, sowing, transplanting, weeding and even driving the bullocks during threshing and winnowing, and guarding the fields during harvest. They also helped care for cattle and other livestock. Agricultural skills were passed from one generation to the next.[138] A kisan *neta* said to me, "Daan paida karne ke liye sab kaam karte they" ("every individual in the household participated in the tasks of producing grain"). While men usually took charge of ploughing the land and making furrows for irrigation, women assisted them in sowing the crops. The women were often accompanied by the younger children in domestic tasks like collecting cowdung for fuel, making cowdung cakes, removing stones, and collecting wood for fuel. However it was *begar* (unpaid labour) for the zamindar and his household which kept men, women and children working outside their own homes most of the day. There was no formal training: children observed their mothers and fathers at work ploughing, sowing and harvesting the crops and thus learnt the many tasks involved. The ordinary cultivator could recognise the nature of the soil by feeling it and could assess it on the basis of its salt content. There were many kinds of soil in addition to *doras, matiyal* and *balua*. They "read" the soil and in accordance with their assessment adapted their methods with the plough and other tools; sowing was regarded as a skilled job. Measuring and sowing was done with precision so not an inch of land remained uncultivated. If it did it would be not just a waste of space: one's reputation was at stake.[139] In the plains, water was easily available although there was a water

[138]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 30 September 1991
[139]Interview with Bangali Ram, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 14 September 1991.

problem in some areas which demanded careful management.

The field had to be ploughed seventeen or eighteen times, after which the *khad* or manure was spread. There was great stress laid on the use of manure like *gobar*, neem cakes, and powdered bone (if affordable). As one saying goes:

> Khadai kura to tarai, karam likhai tar joi Rahiman kahai bujhai ke, deopans banai.[140]

("Fate may change and fortune drop, but manure secures the crop. Rahiman says supply the dung, as I have said and also sung.")

One could gauge the importance of the crop by the preparation of the field and the rituals which preceded such activity. In the case of sugarcane, all the kisans worked together peeling selected sticks of cane and soaking them overnight in the village pond. One stick of cane was kept aside for each household and the women put it in a *keora* filled with water. It was placed in the corner of the hut. It was their fervent hope that the cane crop would be healthy and full of juice.[141]

On the following morning, the women and men participated in sowing the crop. The weeding of the crops was usually done by little girls and boys. After a fortnight the crop was watered and this marked the beginning of the production cycle. The crop was watered by many methods. Usually a woman or man used to guide a pair of bullocks while two other women lowered a leather container into a well and pulled it out so that the water could flow through the furrows constructed on the previous day. In some cases it was possible to construct small channels for each field from the *talabs* or *jhils*. It took five to eight days to irrigate a *bigha* of land. If the soil was loamy, as was the case in parts of Gorakhpur and

[140]Jafri, History and Status, p. 257. The original and translated version have been taken from this book.

[141]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, 29 September 1991.

Basti, the crop required no irrigation even in the case of sugarcane.[142] No one could afford to hire labour and self help was glorified.

Pura chahey tho apne gaehoun odha jab harwahe rahe,

Jo puuch hal bote kahan ? Uski kheti jahan ki tahan

Kheti boti binani, jo ghode ka taang,

Apne hath sawariyan jab ji rahe anand.

Aaan kad siddha, aan kad ghee, puri chane Babaji

Aalass neendh kisne nausse, char nausse khansi,

Hansi kushi Sanyasi nausse, Gyani hiy nausse dasi.

("If you want the entire crop then you should sow it yourself because if you leave it to the others then the yield will amount to only half the crop. Those who share their plough have to forsake their field for others. If one farms and weeds for others then one has no carrying power and life is difficult. So to have happiness in life one should cultivate one's own land. The Brahmin brings a large iron pan and a can of *ghee* to fry *purees*. Just as a thief cannot afford to cough so also the kisan cannot afford to be lazy and sleep late or as an ascetic gives up worldly pleasures or an enlightened man does not desire a woman for pleasure alone.")

The work of cultivation and farming was not regarded as unskilled labour by the kisans. Farming was an extremely difficult task and involved a considerable amount of mental as well as physical labour. The kisans often complained of the arduous nature of the work. They had to work long hours, in all kinds

[142]Jafri, History and Status, p. 261.

of weather and in the open. They often had to trudge a long way from their homes and work in the zamindar's fields. This was particularly painful because although they produced all the food, they could retain only a small share of the crops. It was a kind of moral and physical degradation caused by their weak contractual position in the system of land tenure: they believed they had no choice, as cultivation of land was their way of life.

Kheti aap seti

Khetihar ko avkash kahan,

Aalas neend kisane nausse.

("Since agriculture is the only means of livelihood, there was no rest for the kisan who simply could not afford to be lazy or oversleep.")

There were also songs for each day of the week, every month, and also songs for the different kinds of crops and agricultural tasks: they constituted a powerful oral tradition and remain an extremely valuable source for understanding popular wisdom. Both men and women sang work songs to lighten their worries and the burdens of hard labour. More importantly, they reflect how the kisans' consciously drew upon images of the cosmic order and related them to everyday human experience.

The annual cycle of cultivation was conditioned by the fasli calendar and here the seasonal changes were important. The new year began in *Chaiti*, that is from mid-March to the mid-April. The winter (rabi) crops were mature, and harvesting of wheat, barley, oilseeds, gujar, gram and peas began; whole stalks of wheat, pulses and barley were cut and stored on the threshing floor or *kaliyan*.[143]

[143]Shahid Amin, "The trial of Chauri Chaura" paper presented at the SOAS South Asia history seminar on 11 March 1993, notes that the term *kaliyan* comes from the phrase "Kali-

The grain was separated from the chaff by treading with oxen (if the farmer was well off) but usually women and children were assigned the task of beating out the grain from the stalk by hand. Women were also responsible for storing the grain. The younger women in the family were in charge of pounding the grain. They had to devise some means of surviving until the next harvest. Unlike the tasks of harrowing, weeding or sowing which demanded strenuous work, harvesting meant intense activity and excitement because it was time to gather the crop. They rose before the break of dawn and worked until sunset: subsistence farming gave this chore a plenty-or-hunger edge. They entertained themselves by singing *kajli geet*.

> Kajli,
>
> Chiitiya pey Chittiya likhi baba morey bhajani, kajli khelan beti aye naa,
>
> Kaise ke khajli khelan baba ai, nadey barhal phuphukari na acharia i phar beti kevat ke chhar nadiya dahavat ghar aye na.

("The father wrote many letters to his daughter asking her to come and visit and play *khajli*. But the daughter did not come. She said, 'Oh! how can I come father dear, the river is in flood and it is difficult to cross'. The father replied, use the piece of your saree as a sail on the boat that will bring you home to us.")

The *kaliyan* was usually close to the kisan's hut and was often regarded as a second home. Out of approximately 270 days of working on the land, about 60 days were spent on the khaliyan. The grain had to be guarded from thieves and rats, and the task of winnowing was usually performed at night when there was a convenient wind. Dry fodder was prepared from the stalks of wheat, maize and

---

mai ka-than" the goddess Kali's booty.

corn, the straw of varieties of rice and the chaff of cereals, peas and other pulses. These chores were rarely completed before May or June because the fields had to be prepared for planting sugarcane and other *kharif* crops.

Chaiti was regarded as an auspicious time for marriages to be arranged, and this was an extremely important social activity. Many festivals were celebrated at this time, the most significant being the worship of Sheetala Devi, better known as Bhagauti Mai, who was a powerful presence in village life. She was known as the dispenser of diseases like cholera, smallpox, chickenpox, malaria, dysentery and other epidemics. All those who contracted illnesses were deemed to be under the influence of the Goddess *"Devi ki chhaya"* and offerings and prayer were essential for their recovery. She was often described as intemperate and high strung and prone to feminine guile. The power and influence of this local goddess, and indeed of other gods, was measured by the sickness and stresses attributed to them; she was often regarded as the most fearful because she generated the worst anxieties of sickness and death.

The months of *Baisakh* (between April-May) and *Jeth* (May-June) were the hot months of summer. Kisans joked about the high temperatures;

Maiy ka aan pahuncha hai mahina, bahey adey sey choti tak pasina.

("The month of May has arrived and the sweat pours from the hair to the ankles.")

The work pattern of the kisans depended on the season. Normally the kisans rose at 4 a.m. and worked till 11 a.m. in the fields. They resumed agricultural tasks from about 5 p.m. and worked as long as the light remained. The planting of sugarcane began in early April followed by that of early rice or *bhadon*, maize, corn, lentils, peas. There was considerable dependence on a good rainfall for a

satisfactory kharif harvest; it would also influence the planting of the rabi crops. The lack of rainfall meant famine, and kisans dreaded it as they would have no crops or money to buy food and the cattle would die of starvation. This was the season for worshipping the rain gods and the particular deity of the village received considerable attention. A popular saying indicates their impatience with the continuing presence of the dry western winds;

Jey din jeth bahey purvai, tey din sawan dhul udaiyi.

("As long as the western winds blows away the eastern winds, there will be no rains, only dust will blow about.")

The month of Jeth was also the month of worshipping Ganga Mai, the river. *Melas* held on the river banks. Just before the early rains or *dongira*, the ploughing of fields was completed. Kisans believed "jahan mitti bulaiyi hai vahan hal chaa" ("when the mud is hard ploughing is necessary"). In normal times it required three to four days for the mud to crush like powder as the humidity decreased. Often seeds already sown were swept away if the rains were heavier than usual. The instruments used were made of wood. The *hal* (plough) was tipped with iron points, the *kodal* was a sort of spade and the *khurpi* was the hoe. The cultivator prepared the field for sowing by spreading manure and raising embankments. The paths through the fields were narrowed to provide maximum space for cultivation. Every inch of land was of great value because of the small size of the holding.

By the month of *Asarh* (mid-June to mid-July) the kharih crops were sown as soon as the ground had been prepared. Those who had had been able to manure the field were content. As one verse ran:

Asarh mei gobar khet mei jawaii, bhar muthi dana pawai

khad Asarh khety men dave tab phir khubani dana pawai.

Gobar maila neem ki khali, yase kheti duni phali,

khad pare to khetnahin to kura ret.[144]

("In Asarh, manure a field, it will then a full harvest yield. In Asarh provide manure, sufficient corn you will procure. Dung, refuse, cakes of neem, double crop will over teem. If manure you do not give, nothing in the field will live.")

This was also the time to propitiate snakes as they emerged from the pits: this area had a very high mortality rate from snake bites. People were careful to use agricultural tools carefully for fear that the movement of soil would injure the snakes and make them irate. *Mahua* flowers, which are supposed to keep snakes away, were scattered around kisans' homes. *Neem* leaves were burnt inside the huts after they had been cleaned and the homes were considered purified. The worship of Nag Baba was an offering of appeasement to prevent snake bites and Nag Panchami was an extremely popular festival as it symbolised procreation.

Another of the natural calamities that the villagers feared was the severity of the floods. During the monsoons the countryside was submerged in water. Normally people feared the "asard ki pani" (the monsoons) because it spelt trouble in the form of floods and epidemics. Dead bodies were seen floating on the rivers, mostly victims of cholera, and the waters had an abominable stench. Sometimes the fields were littered with dead bodies of humans and animals, which were not removed for weeks and were left to rot. Often the fields of the poor kisans were obliterated by the flooded rivers. One of the worst floods happened in August 1934. The water level was about seventeen and a half feet above normal. More

[144]Jafri, History and Status, p. 257.

than a thousand villages in Gorakhpur district were submerged. All the six *tahsils* were affected by this flood. It was reported that in one village called Iroha, seven miles from Chauri Chaura, the villagers were so numbed by shock that they were taken aback to see that any form of life still existed. The kisans had been hungry for eight days and had spent four days searching for lost members of their families. There were seven or eight women very thin and ill carrying babies and searching for work. One was reported as saying, "Kaheke pata naikhe, ne jaane kahan vilap gail boat log", ("There is no sign of the others, we have no news, we don't know what became of the boat people").[145] The flood waters took about a month to subside.

The magnitude and duration of the floods varied and constituted a great and constant source of anxiety; many men and women sat up all night to keep watch in anticipation of rising waters. Some rivers such as the Rapti, the Ghaghra, the Tons and the Sarju were notoriously dangerous. For instance, between 1931 and 1951 it was reported that the *katav* (curve) of the Saryu river which flowed from Barhalganj to Barhaj had caused tremendous losses and also accounted for 5,000 acres of land being washed away.[146]The villages of Salkhas, Bagaha, Teligara, Bardiha, Dausa, Dubauli had ceased to exist, and it was feared that the villages of Bagehri, Bardiha, Dawa, Kolkas would also disappear. By 1954, 25 villages had ceased to exist.[147]

While floods affected everyone, zamindar, daroga and kisan, the kisans believed that diseases only afflicted them with illness and death. There were two kinds of malaria here: endemic and epidemic. The most frequent cause of death

[145] *Aaj*, 24 August 1934.
[146] *Aaj*, 22 October 1951.
[147] *Aaj*, 1 April 1954.

was *"bokhar"* (fever), which could mean cholera, plague or malaria. The kisans saw a relationship between floods and malaria, because floods destroyed every available asset and were like a bad famine (which meant no food), hence they caused a greater weakening of the spirit. Most of the time it meant that all the cultivators would suffer, particularly the low castes because they never received any relief supplies. So the lower-castes such as the Chamars, Ahirs, Lunias, Pasis, Nais suffered the most. However, anyone could become a victim of Sheetala Devi and fall ill with either chickenpox or smallpox. Many people lost their lives and children died. In some cases women and men were widowed. In either case it was a time of great despondency and sorrow.

During the months of Sawan (July-August) and *Bhadon* (August-September), the planting of the kharif crops was completed. Resources were usually so scarce that kisans had to borrow or sell their animals to procure seeds and manure for the next season. The maize crop was hoed and rice watered. The transplantation of rice seedlings was usually done by women.

Sawan and *Bhadon* were regarded as a time of great social activity for women in particular who followed many rituals of fasting and propitiating the gods. The worship of Hanuman at this time of the year brought special rewards and sometimes offerings were made to monkeys consisting of bananas and other fruits which were left under the trees. It was also the time for praying to the river Ganga and garlands made of marigold and flowers were left close to the banks of the nearest river. Kajalis were sung and there are many kinds of song which celebrated maternal and paternal relationships in a family such as the bond of affection between father and daughter.

From about *Kuar* (September-October) to *Kartik* (October-November) the kharif crops of maize, san, hemp, millet and pulses were harvested. The rest of the fields were cultivated with sugarcane, rice and pulses. Once again the fields were irrigated and hoed and the soil was levelled. The rabi crops of wheat, barley, mustard, peas and gram were sown. By late October the late rice crop was harvested and the stalks of san hemp were put in a small pond to loosen the fibre. The plant was said to be extremely good for restoring nutrition to the soil, and the rest was used as cattle fodder (*bhusa*). The inner stalks were dried and used as fuel. The goddess Lakshmi dominated the month of Kuar and Vishnu the month of *Kartik*. The festival of Deepavali was celebrated at this time and oil lamps were lit after the huts were cleaned.

Just before early winter the Musahars would build and repair their homes and, being skilled in the task of building huts, would repair those of the other cultivators. They would do so by strengthening the mud walls and adding extra layer of special grass to the thatched roofs. In the *tahsils* which were more prone to floods, sometimes these huts would have a space to store valuable goods and provide a refuge. The huts here were usually constructed on a mound which marked the flood level.

The months of *Pus* and *Magh* were the starvation months for the kisan. Due to the severity of the cold, the Rabi crops such as peas were vulnerable to destruction by hail, and the sugarcane crop required irrigation which could often be a problem. Kisans could rarely look forward to even one square meal a day. At other seasons it was easier because the heat was bearable, and seasonal labour was in demand, but during these three to four months it was impossible to earn an income, however meagre. One kisan described the fear of winter, "We hardly

had any clothes to wear and the torn clothes we wore were the only clothes we possessed and worn through the years. At night the family huddled together in the hut and used beds made of *puual* with a just an old quilt or blanket for protection".[148] If they were lucky they would get an *angatti* in which they burned cowdung and took turns sharing it.

The month of *Paaghun* (mid-February to mid-March) marked the end of the agricultural year. From early January until March one of the main household jobs was to chop the stalks and separate the leaves of corn and maize and use it as fodder. The grain is separated from the chaff. This was also the time for harvesting the *jarhan* (late rice crop). The kisans were usually more optimistic and looked forward to the brief respite awaiting the sale of the sugarcane crops. They believed that this was just the time to thank Shiv Shankar for his protection:

Sawan mas bahe pukhiya,

Bail beichi lahu Dhanugaya.

("In the month of Sawan when the eastern wind blows the cultivator has finished the hard work [symbolised by the selling of his bullocks] and awaits the presence of good fortune [Dhanugaya or Kamadhenu, the cow of Shiva.")

Another verse indicates the time for enjoyment had drawn near:

Jo purva yamike bahe, Phagun o Baisakh,

to kisan man mei kami teenak na lone makh

("When the eastern winds blow at the time of Phagun or Baisakh, then the kisans do not seem to be wanting in the slightest.")

[148]Interview with Bangali Ram, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 14 September 1991.

The early part of January was celebrated as Makar Sankranti and a village fair was sometimes held, and it was supposed to mark the turning of the seasons. The festival of Holi was celebrated and *phaguas* were sung marking the occasion; it formally heralded the end of winter. It was generally regarded as a time of rejoicing. It was a time for men and women to drink liquor and often kinsfolk got together and sacrificed an animal as an offering for the Goddess Phulmati. The sacrificial animal, usually a goat, was cooked and jointly eaten. Depending on the sighting of the moon, Id ul Fitr was also celebrated after the month of fasting that happened during Ramzan.

Then *Chaiti* came around again and another agricultural year commenced. The kisans admitted that it could be seen as a toilsome and monotonous life but "it had its moments of roguish gaiety". To them the land symbolised life, fertility and their only source of nourishment. The land could also be hostile and unrelenting, causing hardship and pain. But while they could cope with the vagaries of nature, zamindari *julum* was another matter altogether.

To conclude, it seems impossible not to recognise that there was an abyss between the official understanding of society and that of the kisans. This was illustrated by the pronounced dichotomy in rural society with the zamindars and the colonial administration on one side, and the kisans on the other. As we have seen, they constituted two opposing streams of consciousness with regard to the construction of reality. The administration disregarded not just local categories and distinctions and gave a higher status to colonial representations. The movements against *julum* drew upon the popular world-view by introducing the issue of social accountability. However, the official idiom of discourse never attributed popular resistance to an unjust and coercive administration, and the

ills in society were blamed on wasteful social customs, illiterate and litigious peasants, troublemakers (Congress), and natural calamities.

The overwhelming exploitation the kisans experienced made them acutely aware of their own powerlessness. They believed that although they had been forced to bow to the authority of the Powers-that-Be, at a personal level they listened to their own consciences. The nature of such consciousness was tempered by the culture: their own emotional and mental predispositions grounded in social relationships of power and loyalty. This was rooted in the validation of knowledge, the continuous process of reviving the past within the present: what they were and how they became.[149] They were explicitly aware of *julum*. However the wealth and clarity of such consciousness could only grow at the same time as the wealth and clarity of the expression it received. Until then it was to remain "the politics of inner experience" and did not achieve political expression.[150]

[149]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.
[150]Interview with Ramu Kurmi, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 19 September 1991.

Chapter 2

Gender and Oppression

This chapter analyses popular perceptions of gender within the wider context of caste, religion and popular politics. It has rightly been argued that gender can no more be marginalised in the study of human society than can the concept of human action in defining society.[1] People are always gendered individuals and have a place in a system of categories which have been given masculine and feminine characteristics. In addition, images are assigned to these characteristics, which are not fixed but dependent on a number of factors such as cosmology, forms of livelihood, and the environment. These actions, ways of thinking and judging were reproduced in social practice and informed popular politics. The main questions to be addressed here are: How did the kisans perceive gender, caste and religion? How did they symbolise them? How did they represent these relations to themselves? How did they associate with them? I argue that these systems of evaluation were also distinctly influenced by productive, procreative, domestic and cultural roles: all these relationships are to be explained by the interaction of values which were in part governed by custom and also by the way various individuals could present and negotiate gendered ideologies. It is essential to highlight the various dimensions of inequality in gender divisions in order to analyse how they influenced social practice—the actions, ways of seeing and informing the political identities of the kisans.

[1]Henrietta Moore, Feminism and Anthropology, (Cambridge, 1987).

In general, men were traditionally vested with primary rights in kinship and social organisation: the predominant values were articulated from a male perspective. However, one needs to investigate the specific mechanisms by which these rights were exercised by different groups of men and analyse all extant cultural, economic, political relations which granted preference to men over women. Strathern warns that there is a need to guard against seeing social conventions as being imbued with the values appropriate to and created by one gender rather than the other and so avoid a double arbitrariness that society is a convention and it is a convention that men are prominent in it.[2] By doing so there is the implicit assumption that there is only one cultural system and that men and men's activities define it. Thus one will fail to see any separate spheres of life which are defined and controlled by women. What is also being analysed is not just whether women had any formal political power but that whatever domain women do control may be a structural feature in defining the male domain.[3]

Aspects of gender

This section examines the construction of gender in kinship and social organisation, marriage and sexual activity, economic roles and in the religious life of the kisans of eastern U.P. Clearly men were at an advantage in the existing power relations between genders. However, women as well as men constructed and defined both masculinity and feminity within this cultural and symbolic order, and

[2]Marilyn Strathern, Gender in the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society, (Cambridge, 1988), argues that however useful the concept of society may be to analysis, the use of the term society needs to be qualified because its just a way of thinking about generalisations and assumptions existing at the moment amongst any given collectivity of people.

[3]Annette Weiner, "Trobriand Kinship from another view: The reproductive power of men and women", Man, 14, 1978, p. 334.

their gendered positions realised through age, caste, and status influenced their social activities. Although men were privileged, did gender relations in these areas reproduce the wider patterns of *julum* exclusively through male exploitation and oppression? There is a need to dislocate "masculinity" as much as there is a need to express feminity; power relations among men (as among women) were influenced by their social identities and constructed different masculinities and feminities as the following arguments will illustrate.

The expression of male and female activity was distinctly marked among the upper-castes; gender identity for women was characterised by their subordinate status, dependency on men, controlled sexual activity, *purdah* (seclusion), *ghunghat* (veil), concepts of female pollution, etc. Although gender oppression among lower-caste women did not differ much from the upper-castes, they experienced fewer gender inequalities. Among the lower-castes, the domestic, conjugal and kin roles often overlapped and were linked with their occupational roles: gender divisions were less marked among the labouring poor. So one needs to compare and contrast the dichotomy in gender relations between these castes in these main spheres. Such issues need to be accounted for when discussing differences in men and women's status and levels of exploitation in order to define their own perceptions of inequality.

The worship of the female principle was cardinal as femaleness signified procreation, fertility and general well-being. However, although femaleness was sometimes positively valued for and in itself, being female had distinct negative connotations which were discernible through these cultural valuations and representations. Before discussing these differences, it is important to recognise that there were fundamental values that were common to "growing up female" in

India.[4] As a norm, being born female was not valued in itself and women suffered from systematic social injustice because they received negative reinforcement in comparison with men as illustrated by the following verses taken from a play titled *"Meheruwan key Durdasa"* ("The Tragic Plight of Women".)

Purukawa,

Ek maibpava sey ek hi udaka mey duna ke janamwa bhailey, rey purukawa.

Putak janamwa mein nacch ah sohar hola betikey janak par sogh.

Dhanwa dhartiya phe betwa ky hak hola betita seykichuwa na hak, purukawa

Marda key khaila—kamila ke raheta ba tiriya key logla kewad, rey purukawa.

Kheyvey key ranpawa jinigiya bhar pari aakey laikey jey marda mualley, rey purukawa.

Tiriya key muwale th batiya kawan puccha? jiyatey sawatiya ley ave rey purukawa.

Aankhiye key dekhatey paturiya ley rakhwaley ba maar giri dela din raat, rey purukawa.

Ohi rey kasurawa mardawa key kuuch nahi titiya key baksi jhokavey rey purukawa.[5]

[4]Leela Dube, "On the construction of gender: Hindu girls in patrilineal India", Economic and Political Weekly, XXIII, 1988, WS, pp.11–24.

[5]Rahul Sankritayan, Teen Bhojpuri Natak (Allahabad, 1946), p. 5. It was staged in Hazari Bagh jail (Bihar) in December 1942.

("Oh Man, both of us were born from the same womb and belong to the same parents. The birth of a son brings merriment and songs and dance, but the birth of a daughter brings only sorrow. The son has claim to all the riches and land belonging to the family but the daughter has nothing to her name. Man has innumerable opportunities open for a livelihood while all doors are closed for a woman. If a husband dies a woman has to bear the stigma of widowhood all her life, but a man is not unduly disturbed by the death of his wife. There is no one to pay attention to a woman's tears; sometimes even with his wife alive, a man openly cohabits with another woman. In the presence of his wife he entertains prostitutes in his home and beats and abuses his wife day and night. No one finds fault with a man, but a woman has to undergo unspeakable torment.")

This song reflects the general plight of "being born female" in India. The birth of a girl was widely regarded as a cause for mourning because girls were never seen to belong to their natal home; their real home was with their future husband's family. Although a girl was nourished and brought up by her parents she was regarded as a wasteful expense. In addition her father had to bear further expenses on account of her marriage. The birth of a son, however, spelt good fortune because the son was expected to carry the patrilineage forward, bring money into the family, look after his parents in their old age and also light the funeral pyre. Men were given considerable latitude and hardly ever met censure. A woman always had to prove herself to be virtuous, devoted and chaste. She could not just be a person like a man could: she was either a *devi* or a whore; in any case she suffered being born female.

The terms and references used in common parlance involved gender. They were usually first and foremost kinship categories, influencing strategies around

which the economic, political and social relations such as marriage, sexual activity, reproduction, domestic relations, and various occupations were organised. Kinship was the framework around which inter-personal ties were organised. The relationship between the husband and wife was governed by the relationship between the mother-in-law and her son (the husband). Mothers-in-law were often depicted as being dominating and hard task masters and feared by the bride. However, once she gave birth to a son, the wife gained in status and self-esteem. If she repeatedly failed to bear a son she was regarded as a misfortune to the household and a husband either took another wife or adopted his brother's son. Music and other popular forms of entertainment are important sources of information for analysing such expressions of gender identity. *Sohar* was sung to mark the occasion of the birth of a boy:

> Raat maye nandlala, sunnat piya dol gaye,
>
> sauri Rakhawey sas baili, mangey li soney ke macchiawa.
>
> Sunnat piya dol gaye, nari chinn ke dagirtan ayili,
>
> Mangey soney ke hansuliawa, sunnat piya dol gaye,
>
> Roti Beilan key jethani ayili, maget soney ki beilanwa.
>
> Sunnat piya dol gaye Suharo potan ke nanari ayili,
>
> mangey soney ke potanawa, sunnat piya dol gayey.[6]

("Krishna was born at night [the birth of a boy], and hearing that everyone is happy. The place is guarded by the parents in-law, and the baby is sitting on a cot of gold. The father is rejoicing and everyone wants a reward: the midwife

[6]Sung by Mamta,Jaggi and a few others Chatera village, Shorhatgarh.

asks for a golden knife [to cut the umblical cord], the sister-in-law wants a golden rolling pin, the grandmother wants a pot of gold.")

This song shows how the birth of a son caused celebration. A male child was regarded as "the light of the lineage and the provider for the future, one who could alter the family fortunes"—so all hopes were vested in him and everyone in the family wanted to be rewarded, in the belief that their goodwill influenced the mother to conceive a male child.[7]

Marriage and Livelihood

Among the lower-castes marriage was usually endogamous, although the bride and groom rarely belonged to the same village. Until the 1940s dowry usually meant the father of the bride gave a small bit of tobacco to the father of the groom and the marriage was fixed. The bride's father used "to look at the field before agreeing to the *biaha* engagement".[8] On account of poverty, the community in a village did its best to assist the bride's family who had to bear the expenses for a caste wedding, which was regarded as an occasion for everyone to celebrate. Turmeric was crushed and a white *motia dhoti* (thick cloth) was dyed yellow to be worn by the bride. Cloth was expensive and this was all a kisan household could afford. The lower-castes could not touch *tulsi* as by custom only the upper-castes could worship it, so local herbs called *bhangraiya* and *siwana* were crushed with neem to be consumed with "the empowered water".[9] By custom, girls were always married before puberty to boys who were two or three years older. Pre-pubertal girls were regarded as *devis* endowed with supernatural energy and

[7]Dube, "One the construction of gender", p. 15.
[8]Interview with Dharma, Kotila village, 17 January 1992.
[9]*Idem.*

power. Most of the kisan women I spoke to said they were eight or nine years of age when their marriage was fixed. This indicates how the bargaining rights over a girl's fertility was critical in determining her status. After menarche, they lived with their in-laws and another ceremony called *gauna* was performed to mark the consummation of the marriage. After marriage the brides retained strong ties to their natal lineage to which they could return and claim shelter if their husbands were unbearable.[10] Lower-caste women did not have to adopt their husband's kin terms. Both the wife's kin (uterine) and the husband's kin (agnatic) were usually regarded as equally important. Residence was not necessarily patrilocal. A lower-caste settlement consisted of a cluster of thatched mud huts within a courtyard. An average kisan household comprised six or seven individuals: a surviving parent, the married couple and children. The women used their homes for cooking, childbirth, childcare and general family maintenance. During the agricultural year, men rarely stayed at home unless they were too ill to do any work.

Most of the essential economic tasks were shared by men and women both inside and outside the home. Women were often accepted as partners if not as equals.[11] They could discuss their problems with the men whether they were husbands, fathers or brothers, who were sympathetic to their point of view. Much of the labour was family labour. Errant husbands who did not work were abused and depending on the nature of their bad habits were sometimes punished by their wives who refused to sleep with or feed them. Although this was not a common occurrence, some women periodically took refuge in their mother's home and after some time lapsed the husband arrived to fetch her having promised the

[10]Interview with Parbi, Sonmara village, Azamgarh, 22 January 1992.
[11]*Idem*, 18 January, 1922.

mother he would behave well. Men were dependent on women's contribution in agriculture. Women were just as knowledgeable as men about land management techniques, being skilled agriculturists in their own right. Both women and men spent a lot of time working in the fields and attending to special tasks in the zamindars's estate. Thus both men and women worked side by side: women used to transplant and weed the land on a more regular basis than their men who were forced to work on the zamindar's land. Once married they moved, unaccompanied, inside and outside the village, enjoying a degree of social freedom which was limited because as women, married or widowed, they were vulnerable to the "evil intentions of upper caste men".[12] Children aged between four to ten were taught all the housework and had to assist in odd jobs such as fetching water, *bhusa*, cleaning the *chulha*, sweeping their homes and courtyard, making cowdung cakes for fuel and fetching firewood. So like adults, children were overworked, and thus they could rarely attend school or study. Villagers recognised that education was important and believed that because it could empower them the zamindar's prevented them from receiving any kind of education.[13] The older children were responsible for looking after the younger ones.

In sharp contrast, upper-caste women enjoyed very little freedom and had virtually no formal authority. Marriage was endogamous. Before marriage a women belonged to her father's *gotra* but after marriage she was assimilated into her husband's lineage;[14]women adopted their husband's kin names. Inheritance was patrilineal. Wealth was transferred from the bride's lineage to the groom through dowry payments contributing to the socio-economic interests of the patrimony,

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Interview with Vidwa, Pariha village, Azamgarh, 16 January 1992.

[14] The obligation to follow *sapinda gotra* (seven generations) rules were typical among Brahmins.

which was tied up to landownership. Marriage was an extremely important step in the life of a girl because it meant leaving her natal home. It was regarded by custom as auspicious, the beginning of a new life.

Shuub bolo Brahman, soney ka kalasha,

Shuub levey chahhli, beti dulahin deyi,

Daba par pawal rey panwa, sey pan kkhaili dularu duharam

Minal bati sey dantawa, hansi wali dularu dulharam

Sasu khirkheli dantawa.

Kaisey mei hansi bolu? Kaisi mei khailiwalu ?

Madiyey sajjan sav logwa, tuahrey mein sajna key bhojana karuwey

ruaraey key pawal panwa.

(" 'Oh priest, utter good words that resonate like a pitcher of gold. The bride moves to absorb the good words, with a box to make *pan* (betel leaf). The groom chews the *pan* which is spread over his thirty two teeth. The groom laughs and speaks while the mother-in-law watches his teeth. The bride sighs, How can I laugh and how can I speak in the marriage enclosure where my companion and other people are present ?' The mother-in-law says to the bride that she will feed the husband with food but for the bride the stale *pan* will do".)

This song clearly shows the resentment of the mother-in-law for the bride and the competition for the man's affection. Among upper-castes women marriage was rarely experienced as companionship between a man and a woman. The son often became his mother's companion and she was loath to lose it. The daughter-in-law was usually ill-treated and regarded as a rival and there was great tension

in the household. Sons often took their mother's side and their wives suffered a great deal on this account. The wife was unable to protest because she had been taught that as a bride she had to keep a low profile in her new home. She had to cover her head in front of the elders and act with deference. It is small wonder that many women recall their happiest moments were when they were little girls in their parent's home. The home of their in-laws was often seen as a prison; it could never be a home from home.

This problem was further exacerbated because patrilocal residence was required among high castes. This form of patrilocality strengthened the position of men because it created and reinforced a distinction between consanguineous women or mothers, sisters, daughters and affinal women or wives and in-laws. Brides were addressed as *dulhan* (bride). They could not address anyone in their in-laws' family by name but only by their affinal title; often men rarely knew the names of their mothers—they just called them *mai*.[15] The wife could only eat after her husband and the older members of the household were fed. In contrast to kisan households, men did not do any housework and the tasks of childcare and cooking were left entirely to the women. Usually women's tasks involved the preparation of meals and supervision of the domestic servants to perform housework. Upper-caste women did no extra domestic work and had no additional income. These were usually joint family households and women were held responsible for maintaining peace; all tensions, including conflict between brothers in the household, were blamed on women; in cases of extreme conflict, it often resulted in setting up a separate *aangan* (hearth) for cooking.

[15]In upper-caste households, she was called *bahu*(daughter-in-law) by the members of the household or kin. In my conversations with some lower-caste male kisan activists, there was a tendency to address their mothers as *matari* and on being queried they could usually recall their mother's name.

The authority of males over women was regarded as absolute: women were socially, legally and economically subordinate to men. These cultural roles were taught at a very early age. Boys and girls were treated differently. Boys often received better nutrition. Many women said it was not that they undervalued their daughters but they did not want their daughters to mature early. Boys received more education than girls and their training occurred alongside the girls: both were made conscious at an early age about modes of behaviour and the degree of social freedom they could exercise. The construction of femininity took a further turn with the onset of puberty which was clearly "a rite of passage" marking the transition from girlhood to womanhood.[16] A second marriage ceremony was held, the *gauna*, to indicate the consummation of marriage and that the time had come for the girl to leave her natal home. This was another experience upper-caste women shared with the lower-caste women. Among both castes, a girl experienced dramatic social changes in the life when her body was seen as "full":[17] a body with special sexual and procreative powers which were auspicious, emphasising fertility and consummation of marriage. When boys reached puberty there was no special ceremony to mark that occasion. This illuminates that while women were repeatedly made conscious of their status and obligations, to perform and please, men were allowed to mature at their own time and pace, and whatever way that suited them.

The status of a girl or woman meant that she would reside with her husband's family in another village and this meant leaving her natal home as early as possible. There would be speculation about her containing her sexual activity with such a developed body. The girl's family feared that it might encourage gossip

[16]Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (London, 1960)
[17]Dube, "On the construction of gender" , pp. 12–15.

and doubts about her chastity and that would tarnish her reputation and annul her *gauna* (marriage). There were double standards for boys and girls. A boy's reputation never harmed his position but a girl had to be chaste and pure. Girls were taught to be tolerant by their mothers, fathers and other women; to undergo privation and practise self-restraint on behalf of males in the family for whom they should sacrifice and serve: women's lives were to a large extent bound by their activities and responsibilities as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. Both Muslim and Hindu women experienced *purdah* restrictions which circumscribed their movements within the courtyard except on rare occasions, when they had to be accompanied by men. Upper-caste women desiring to go on a religious pilgrimage, such as *Haj*, had to be accompanied by a husband or a son.[18] In the absence of both, a male relative such as a son-in-law accompanied them.

In contrast, lower-caste women enjoyed greater economic freedom; they were responsible for the finances of their households and engaged in independent financial transactions such as borrowing and taking loans. Women usually contributed most of their earnings to the family and made a substantial contribution to meet the expenses of men in purchasing tobacco and liquor.[19] Although most women and men were landless, men could vent their frustrations by the use of physical power and wife-beating occurred. However in a few cases, men also feared "the tongue" of women particularly their below-the belt insults, and "usually tried to behave properly, by assisting their wives and being supportive towards them".[20]

This was largely a society with a low cash income. Both economically and culturally a high value was placed on fertility: more children meant more income-

[18]Interview with Begum Rehana Mauzam, Azamgarh, 12 September 1991.

[19]Bina Aggarwal, "Who sows? Who reaps?: Women and land rights in India", Journal of Peasant Studies, 14, 4, 1988, pp. 531–81.

[20]Interview with Dharma, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 17 January 1992.

generating hands for work. Children were often regarded as their family's greatest assets, helping them in their work and giving them present and future security. The tasks for ensuring procreation, productivity and vitality of a family or kin group were almost entirely controlled by women. In this culture, women were also regarded mystically "as one with the earth, the child bearing variant on the human scale of telluric fecundity", and all religious experiences involving fecundity and birth have a cosmic structure;[21] these symbols and sentiments were enacted through the worship of the mother goddess—"eternal recommencement"—by which the world is periodically recreated.[22] Many women believed that they gained confidence after childbirth and this often encouraged a sense of self-worth in women.[23]It was considered by them to be a profound act of creativity and it was often the only source of self-esteem for women. A popular saying notes that one could look a barren women in the eye but always had to bow one's head in the presence of a mother. So culturally, women were regarded as objects and things whose chief purpose was to marry and reproduce, and they could not demand to be a subject or a person with a self-defined identity. It was not surprising that often reproduction was the only source of self-esteem for many women and they felt empowered by it. Early marriage, a high emphasis on the centrality of childcare, and institutionalised fostering by non-parental kin were traditional institutions that promoted high levels of fertility. lower-caste women had to combine stressful reproduction with other activities. It was more difficult for lower-caste women because they were often hungry, undernourished and vulnerable to death at child-

[21]William Beane and William Doht, (eds.), Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader, I, (London, 1953), p. 204.
[22]*Ibid.*, p. 72.
[23]Interview with Dharma, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 17 January, 1992.

birth. Many such deaths went unrecorded.[24] Most women were mothers by the age of fourteen or fifteen and it was uncommon to find a woman who had not lost a baby or child.[25] Poverty and malnutrition were very high; a lack of basic access to fundamental resources, including food, afflicted many young mothers who denied themselves food to feed their families and sometimes actually caused their own deaths.[26] Often kisans' recollections of death suggested that the true levels of maternal, infant and child mortality often went unrecorded.

Some lower-caste women performed important social tasks for the upper castes: extra domestic duties such as midwifery, leather work, weaving, laundry and household duties. They also participated in ceremonial services like the *tilak* ceremony and rites to do with death. These constituted *begar* for the zamindars' household and they rarely received payments for it. Sometimes it gave them additional goods in kind (usually grain) which offered some respite. These were often specialised tasks: Chamarins were the traditional midwives and usually assisted in childbirth. They lived with the upper-caste women and women of other castes during this time and cut the umbilical cord following the delivery of a baby. They used to bathe the pregnant woman and massaged her to ease the pain of childbirth. Their individual skills as midwives were a matter of pride to them.[27] The Nai women were usually employed in household tasks and were a reliable source of gossip on the "goings-on in the village and the zamindari household".[28] The Teli women and Kurmi women were sometimes regarded with envy as they were comparatively well off and reputed to be successful in managing

[24]Interview with Madhuri Chaubbey, Congress worker, Banaras, 15 August 1991.
[25]Interview with Jaggi Devi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 6 February 1992. She said she had eight children of whom two died shortly after birth and three more died because of hunger.
[26]Interview with Pheja, Sonmara village, 18 January 1992.
[27]Interview with Jammuniya, Chilhia village, Shorhatgarh, 19 February 1992.
[28]Interview with Rumali, Chilhia village, 10 February 1992.

their finances. They often combined agricultural tasks with marketing produce from their kitchen gardens. Often husbands of lower-caste women engaged in such activities also studied magic and gave amulets for headaches or other ailments. Some Chamars, Malis and Nais were regarded as reliable medicine men and they were allowed to administer secret potions based on herbs.

It is clear that both men and women lived together and were influenced by a single dominating system of values and both were dependent on the other for access to productive resources. Although they shared the same culture and the same conceptual categories, their position in those categories varied according to gender, caste and age. There were culturally defined differences in gender which were shared by both upper and lower-caste women but the nature of inequality between men and women was more marked among the upper-castes. Women enjoyed very little freedom of expression and had often to suffer enormous privation. They had little bargaining power in their interaction with the men and found solace in their children. On the other hand, although lower-caste women had greater bargaining powers with their men, so other forms of self-expression were possible through their work and natal ties.

How much can these practices be attributed to the influence of "socialisation"? This term has to be used cautiously. Although social practices informed the belief systems, it is necessary to ask who or what is socialising whom and why. Those in power over others socialise them, and those receiving socialisation are not just compliant victims. Although women and men received information about how to behave, they comply and resist as the occasion arises, and they return something to the "socialiser"—which may alter the kind of socialising

done. Official records rarely discuss women or reported crimes against them.[29] However, when they did so, it was to censure them for breaking what they saw as violating social norms and caste taboo. It is important to recognise that the obligation to marry within the *jati*, and fulfilling the rules of endogamy, were merely convenient strategies which were not fixed. For instance, as early as 1901, it was recorded that in Azamgarh a group of Kurmi women had been charged for the criminal offences of kidnapping, which they had been engaged in for a considerable time before being detected. Their "*modus operandi* was to decoy girls away and get them married in another place, generally making them out to belong to better castes than they really did".[30] In 1928, more cases are recorded for Basti district where it was reported to have been practised for a long time. Many women were arrested and in some cases the girls were made to return to their villages. It appeared that they had been sent to the Punjab, where they were married to the more prosperous Jats. In 1930, following the arrest of one gang, it was reported that "the kidnapping" had been "done with the connivance of the parents".[31] Such cases continued to be occurring as late as 1945. This practice illustrates how lower caste women adopted strategies that enabled them to manipulate and subvert elements of the dominant ideology. This is part of a pattern by which various social groups were able to redefine themselves depending on circumstances, allowing them to modify the allegedly fixed structures of caste. Therefore it was not so much "socialisation" that is going on but interaction involving power differences. Although being a women was viewed negatively

[29]Among the few recorded cases I have seen was a report in the 1927 in United Provinces Police Administration Report p. 7, where a woman was beaten by the zamindar for demanding her wages in Basti. Subsequently she was fatally injured by the zamindar's sons with *lathis*. The case was merely reported and no action was taken against anyone.

[30]*Ibid.*,1901, p. 57.

[31]*Ibid.*, 1931, p. 33.

in cultural and symbolical terms, the meaning of gender changed in different contexts; the economic and social structures which incorporated these distinctions often influenced the roles and position of men and women.

Religion and Sexual activity

How did traditional beliefs influence religious practices and sexual activity in the construction of gender? Customary values governed women's and men's productive and reproductive roles and the ways in which these interacted and affected each other. It was deemed incumbent upon women of both castes to provide the role model for righteous moral and social behaviour. Unlike the lower-castes, upper-caste women were dependent on men to be good sons, brothers, husbands and fathers. They undertook fasting, praying and bathing in the river in festivals which propitiated the male principle such as Karva Chauth, Teej and Dehaliya Chauth Lalahi. They worshipped Parvati and asked her to bless their husbands, brothers and other male members in the family. Thereby women believed they would be blessed in turn by getting caring husbands and sons with good habits. The gods and goddesses they worshipped were usually from the Hindu pantheon—Lakshmi, Parvati, Hanuman, Shiva mainly. Upper-class Muslim women used to fast also. In a year they practiced *roza* (religious fast) at least six times in addition to fasting during Muharram. Women believed that by fasting and praying for their men and children they were being blessed. They described it in the following metaphor: female energy was the earth—mother goddess and the men were the trees that grew out of the earth. If the soil was healthy and fertile then the growth of the plant would be unfettered and it would branch out as a healthy tree and provide shade to the earth. In other words, they did not regard

themselves as helpless victims, but rather in a position to manipulate and penetrate the self- serving claims of men. In fact, religion was one sphere of activity where both upper-caste and lower-caste women clearly had an upper hand over the men.[32]

Upper-caste women were taught to control and sublimate their sexual activity. Sex was regarded as intrinsically dangerous to a man's spiritual salvation. Women were blamed for all the ills that beset a household—even for the death of a husband. Widows suffered all kinds of privation and were regarded as an ill omen. Although divorce was permitted it rarely happened. Thus uncontrolled, or even open, expression of female sexual activity and desire was viewed negatively and had to be sublimated towards religious pursuit and wifely duties. These attitudes enforced elaborate taboos towards menstruation and birth; women affected were secluded during this time, as their touch was regarded as polluting. In contrast, among the lower-castes, such taboos were not strictly enforced.

Although lower-caste women enjoyed a relative degree of gender equality with their men through companionship, and sharing of burdens, women and men were victimised by the wider patterns of *julum*. Most of the low-caste women were victims of exploitation and suffered enormous grief. They had to make themselves available to upper-caste men on demand be they zamindars, *karindas*, *patwaris*, *chowkidars* or their kin; their men were also victims of physical violence by the upper-castes and their children were always under-fed.

Sexual joking was common in this culture, but it was the exclusive privilege of upper caste men to express it openly. However, among the lower-castes, both

[32]Rosalind O' Hanlon, A Comparison between Women and Men:Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India, (Madras, 1994), p. 51., notes that this irked Tarabai who wanted to extend the status of women in religious matters to the domestic and social spheres as well.

men and women took part in it, but it was never done in the presence of elders or outsiders. It was commonly done when women got together to gossip or sought retribution for harm. They abused the upper-caste men and their women by using sex as a metaphor. In the context of this culture, it had an extremely powerful connotation and brings to mind the symbolism associated with the "weapons of the weak". Insult and ridicule were the only weapons that the lower-castes could employ to express their misery.

Beriya ki beriya ham baraji ho lahkadharah sih

Jhinava mat e besa ho lal mai to baraji rahu

jhinava pahireli chinaro e canda ka bahina

jhlaki unke medani ka ba.[33]

("I have repeatedly forbidden you, Lakahan Singh, to buy red muslin, Chanda's sister wears it and reveals her pubic hair")

Sex was used as a metaphor to insult the wrongdoers, by mocking at them and shaming the women in the family thus eroding their honour. Such abuse was also done by the bride's family to insult the family of the groom, the only allowance a woman's natal lineage received in levelling it out with her future husband's family.

Ehirey bhasurava ka cilam aiia nakare

yahi maro takayala gaura hamarire

bhasurava ka labi labi takari.[34]

[33]Sung by Pheja, Sonmara village, Azamgarh, March 6, 1992
[34]*Idem.*

("The groom's older brother has a nose like a marijuana pipe. He stares at my innocent daughter sitting under the wedding canopy. He has very long legs that stride into the wedding canopy".)

It was not uncommon to find secular prostitution among some lower-caste groups who were involved in popular forms of entertainment (such as the Nats, Kurmis and the Barais) often supplementing their income. The problem of increasing landlessness gave both low-caste women and men very little bargaining power. Hunger and poverty caused a great deal of anxiety: they were preoccupied by how to feed the children and stay alive. Although chastity was the ideal it was not always possible: one of the forms of *julum* was the condition of lower-caste women being available to high-caste men on demand.[35] Some songs composed in the *kajli* tradition particularly celebrate how lower-caste women foiled sexual advances by upper-caste men. For example:

Morre Picchvarva Jamuniya ka Paedwa,

Chuwve Jamuniya dagiya Padey sawariya ho,

itni bachchaniya sasuru sunhu nn pawaley,

aile dhobiya palang chaddey gaille.

Kaha rani apna sandes sawariya ho,

sabka to doye palang aordahi se gardahi hamri choliya yamuna beech.

Sabka phailiye choli tihwa se kitwa,

hamre choliya lehengha dali tahaniya.

[35]Interview with Parbi, Sonmara village, Azamgarh, 22 January 1992. Also Prem Chowdhary, "Customs in a peasant economy: Women in colonial Haryana" in Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid (eds.), Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History, (Delhi, 1989), pp. 302-36.

Ghodawa chaddale aawe raja ke chhokaddawa,

Choliya ko dekh muddi aaye sawariya,

Lehu dhobiya daribar sonawwa, choli ke rang batawa sawariya ho

Asiya lagawaa Rani daali bhar sonwwa, choli ke rangiyawa Sayuvaiti sawariya

itni bachani raja sonhu pawali ghodde peet bhaye asawar ho.[36]

("Ripe plums fell from the tree, behind me, [it was Chaiti] and stained my blouse and long skirt and I called out. My father-in law was sitting on the bed and did not hear me—My husband got up to take the clothes to another village (the washerwoman did not wash the clothes in clean water in our village) unless the the washerwoman would not wash my blouse in clean water, in the middle of the the Yamuna, instead of the usual place where she generally washed the others' clothes. She washed my clothes and dried the blouse on the line. The Raja's son came riding by and was sexually aroused by the sight of the blouse in the wind. He offered the washerwoman a pot of gold and questioned her on the identity of the woman [the colour of the blouse]. The washerwoman replied, 'Keep your pot of gold, the woman is unattainable, like Savitri. Hearing this he rode away.")

This song is about the victory of a lower-caste woman who refused to further the sexual interests of an upper-caste man for one of her kind; it is also about values such as loyalty and dignity. She does not succumb to greed, although she could have done well in material terms by accepting the reward he offered. Such songs were popular among lower-caste women who were often regarded "as fair

[36]Sung by Urmila, Kunti, Mamta, Minnar, Vidhawa Sonmara village, Azamgarh, 20 January, 1992.

game" and abused by the men. They signify defiance and complicity to foil the advances of upper-caste men.

There were a few compensations in being a lower-caste woman. Divorce and remarriage were permissible among the lower-castes and a few women recounted cases to me where they cohabited with men. This happened if a husband turned out to be violent or abusive, and his wife, seeing no respite, left for her mother's home with the children. Female sexual activity was not viewed negatively and drew upon the gender imagery associated with the mother goddess: angry, wilful and sexually arousing. Among the lower-castes, although menstruation was regarded as polluting, in practice women paid lip service to this taboo; many continued to work in the fields and perform domestic tasks in their own homes. Lower-caste women viewed their sexuality as *sakti* (strength) to be used to their advantage. This was reinforced in popular imagination by various forms of entertainment. One such being the the *nautanki* (popular theatre). It played a significant role in producing shared values and symbols as well as questioning and subverting received ideologies. It was one of the chief forms of entertainment which women and men watched together. There were many traditions of *naach*and *geet* and the *viragnana* is particularly noteworthy because female heroism is not based on self-sacrifice and subservience but on the direct assumption of power combined with *sat* (truth).[37] It revolves around the seductive image of a woman and commends her active deployment of the body in combat.

In matters of religion, the worship of pantheonic Hindu deities was not common among the lower castes. 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' kisans worshipped Phulmati, Bhagauti Maii, Sheetala, none of whom were visible, and who resided in trees.

[37]Kathryn Hansen, Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India, (Berkeley, 1992), pp. 30, 188.

There were other "spirits of the land", who also had various incarnations such as Ghazi Mian, Pirs, Dih Baba. The worship of the mother goddess commanded the most attention; she had to be kept content or the kisan's fortunes would be affected. No important agricultural task could commence without an auspicious day being fixed for "first beginnings". Women of the household accordingly went to the fields to perform *puja* on the particular *nakhat*. One important ritual was *haroii* where a *tali* (plate) was decked with cooked grain, *gur*, *sindhur* and offered to the goddess Bhavani. It was only after such propitiation ceremonies that men could commence or continue their agricultural tasks.

Numerous songs were composed in the honour of the mother goddess by women. In general, the women said that prayers were directed towards family concerns, good crops, weather, fertility and the well-being of the community.[38] This song addresses all "the seven sisters", the incarnations of the goddess:

Chhoti chooti bitiya basey ka dalava ho phulava lorhai e devi

mailiya phulavariya ho apani madil hoi key

maliya pukarei ho kekarey bitiya e logo

dagailai phulavariya ho kekar bitiya logo

nahi ham bitiya nahi ham patohiya

ham ta hai e malin Sheetala ke satavah bahiniya

Vidhyachal Bhagwati ho ham ta Kali ka Bhavani ho.

("The little girls pick flowers and bamboo branches. The gardener's temple is his garden. He asks the girls, 'Whose daughters are you ?'. He walks in the garden

[38]Interview with Naibhan, Sonmara village, Azamgarh, 20 January 1992.

and asks, 'Whose daughters are you?' They reply, 'We are neither daughters nor sons' wives; We are the seven sisters of Sheetala who are Vindhyachal, Bhagwati, Kali and Bhavani'.")

Bhagwati Mai, Bhavani, Sheetala Devi and Phulmati were incarnations of the goddess. She is no-one's daughter or wife but omniscient mother nature. She was regularly propitiated and sometimes animals were sacrificed. Fasting was important to ensure good crops, health and the well being of the family; women rarely fasted for men. The women had to avoid salt, meat and certain kinds of oil for three or four years after childbirth to prevent *"Devi ki chhaya"*, a visitation from the Goddess of small-pox. Women participated in ritual activities and often "devised ingenious and religious practices to ward off evil and malevolent forces".[39] Magic was an extremely powerful influence on popular religious beliefs. It was often deployed in techniques of conception, and sometimes women used agricultural produce such as hemp, the stalks of sugarcane and cowdung to ward away ghosts and spirits would could cast a spell on them. Their worst fears revolved around the health and livelihood of their children; they believed that newborn babies in particular were most vulnerable. They always ensured that their homes were clean and cowdung paste and neem was often used to drive away evil spirits. Another form of healing was employed through spirit possession; during difficult periods in their lives women used to depend on faith healers to express individual anger, sorrow or resentment by the acts of possession. The victims of most acts of possession were nearly always low-caste women and by expressing personal torment they sought compensation for their helplessness. There was no concept of privacy, that is to say such acts of possession and cure were performed in the

[39]Interview with Dharma, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 18 January 1992.

presence of the entire village; women who were possessed had inevitably experienced various kinds of personal trauma, and due to the shock, they often spoke in stuttering or strangulated tones to expatiate their pain. By expressing their grief publicly women were able to voice the injustice done to them or their family. If women were unable to get any help they attempted suicide. There are cases being reported of women throwing themselves down wells with their children. There were forty-five cases in 1910 and fifty-five in 1912 reported in Azamgarh.[40] But these matter s are not commented upon and the suffering of women is hardly spoken about.

In examining various aspects of kinship, marriage, sexual activity and the belief systems that informed gender relations it is clear that women experienced considerable disadvantages compared to men. How did women in general describe their "powerlessness" in relation to the men? How did women value themselves within cultural structures which confronted them ? and how did women represent for themselves their gender, their sexual activity and the social and symbolic relations in which they, as gendered individuals, are involved? Most women were aware they shared the same symbolic order with men by belonging to the same caste and age group; what they did not share is the same position *vis à vis* that order. Their entry into the cultural order and the position they held as female selves within it was always subordinate to those of men: women were always 'the Other', the object rather than "the One" the subject.[41]. Upper-caste women saw this subordination as a cause and justification for preferential treatment of men, and as not only restricting their social freedom but also denying them access

[40]United Province Police Administration Report, 1910 and 1912.

[41]Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, translated and edited by H. M. Parshley, (London, 1988).

to land, and other resources; sisters had to give up their claims to property to brothers, and widows who demanded a share of property were regarded with considerable hostility. Lower-caste women said that they were *"dharti ke abagiya"* ("the wretched of the earth") anyway and subject to enormous injustice. Despite some degree of gender equality, life was so hard that once they were married with a family, neither they nor their men had anything to compete about because they were in it together: there was never enough food, and other resources were always hard to come by. In fact it seemed that if there were less gender inequalities among the lower-castes it was because of the practicalities caused by poverty and insecurities of livelihood rather than any enlightenment on the part of lower-caste men.

The common attributes that influenced gender identities were both manifested and informed by the social context and the position of the individuals in the life-cycle. Some women argued that although being female connoted an inferior status to men, there was a paradox in the power of the weak and identities were transformed as they went through girlhood, womanhood and motherhood. As sisters became wives and mothers, their transformation altered the status and value of their relationships within the family and society at large; women were able to reify aspects of "male identity": fixing marriages, arranging for loans, organisation of rituals. The position of women of both castes was considerably strengthened once they attained motherhood which conferred on them a further respectability. As mothers-in-law, they commanded more stature in their household, particularly in the case of upper-caste women who had borne sons. Bourdieu's characterisation of women exercising unofficial power or *"éminence grise"* is useful to illustrate the position of upper-caste women; although women

wielded power, they could exercise it only on condition that they leave men with the appearance of exercising all power. Sometimes what women said about themselves appeared to be no more real than what men said about them, that they should be good mothers, wives, sisters and daughters and they should fulfil their reason for being by marrying and giving birth to at least one male child. They appeared to be just as enmeshed as men in the dominant structures of meaning and practice where the predominant values were articulated in terms of a male world view. It was difficult to understand women's apparent willingness and their seeming connivance in situations that appeared to go against their own wishes. There was a very high price to pay for going against the hegemonic and deeply entrenched structures, so they often adopted the line of least resistance and complied with the interests of their family. So the reasons for taking such actions often lay beyond the nature of the act itself.

The visibility of lower-caste women did not reduce their subordination: they believed it enhanced it. To illustrate this contrast of gender imagery a kisan woman recited the following verses that were based on popular wisdom. In the case of the lower-castes she said, "Lathi wale mard rahey, aankh wali goriya",[42] However because life was better for the upper-castes, "Anidhar mard chahi, lajwali goriya".[43] Despite their subscription to an ideal of female passivity, upper-caste women were regarded with envy by the lower-castes, who were plagued by insecurity of livelihood and hunger. They said that in spite of the inequalities and suffering, they did not regret being women. It was their condition of poverty and malnutrition which caused many deaths. Due to their status, higher-caste

[42] "A man should have a *lathi* (be strong to defend his family), and a woman should have inviting eyes".

[43] "A man [could afford to be] understanding and a woman [could afford to be] bashful" recited by Parbi, Sonmara village, Azamgarh, 18 January 1992.

women were in a much stronger position than lower-caste men. Often lower-caste men were subjected to verbal and physical abuse by the upper-caste men. These forms of violent physical punishment were intensified by lower-caste participation in politics and even lower-caste women were not spared.

Male responsiblity in providing for the family was ruled by tradition. Both castes of women were derisive of male responsiblity. Older women said it was a pity that men were allowed to remain as boys, while they were forced to enter womanhood as very young girls. Upper-caste women said that although men provided for them financially, the caring and nurturing of children was their responsibility. They stayed at home and spent most of their time with their children and other women; they shouldered most of the emotional and social responsibilities in the household. Once a boy came of age, his father took charge of him while a girl got married. So men had it easy, all the power but very little responsibility. So if women appeared to reproduce the conditions of their own subordination, men had an active hand in it.

Women in their spheres of interest and existence were quite different from men in their sphere of existence and interest. For example, during festivals and ceremonies they prepared food and shared food together. They watched over the children and exchanged gossip. The entire event was dominated by women and often men were excluded from it. On such occasions, upper-caste women pursued their separate concerns without being dominated by or interfered with by men. It enabled them to develop horizontal solidarities between themselves so that there was a strong sense of sisterhood and fostering by non-parental kin is one common example. Because the social taboos in male-female interaction were fairly clear cut among the upper-castes, this segregation was more pronounced.

Often upper-caste women confided in their servants, who were older lower-caste women, and asked them for advice. Alternatively, if they felt affection towards them, some women tried to help the lower-castes by arranging to give them extra grain or clothes.

Finally, how did these gender representations and idioms play a role in mediating political struggle? Lower-caste men were enmeshed in subservient political patronage relations with the rural *élite* who were very powerful in the political, economic and social domains. Lower-caste women were largely excluded from the formal political process. Both because and in spite of their exclusion, women were able to develop a more direct and open critique of the "master narrative" widening the nature of "formal politics".[44] Their interpretations and assistance influenced the wider processes by which struggles for land, food and other resources and labour reverberated and intersected with the struggles against *julum*. These struggles were simultaneously struggles over socially constructed meanings, definitions and identities.

Due to the greater social freedom lower-caste women were able to exercise by custom, they often constituted a powerful presence in many *jathas*. Many lower-caste women were active members in caste councils and constituted a significant number.[45] Women and men made decisions jointly; members of caste councils were usually respected on account of their age and wisdom. For upper-caste women such political participation meant coming out of *purdah* and it was something entirely new. In the politics of *julum*, low-caste women played an important part in providing the economic base for the struggle: every household contributed

[44]Gillian Hart, "Engendering everyday resistance: Gender, patronage and production politics in rural Malaysia", Journal of Peasant Studies, 19, 1, 1991, pp. 93–121.

[45]Interviews with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991; Lakshmi Narain Pandey, Anandnagar, Maharajganj, 6 March 1992.

a *muthia* (handful) of grain and in some cases even a *chutki* (small pot). Women also politically mobilised other women and led processions. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the wives of many kisan activists kept the movement alive by mobilising women and persuading other kisan families to take part in the movements against *julum*. The workings of many kisan households indicate how wider social and economic processes produced and reproduced changes in their political environment.

However, as Bourdieu has pointed out, the potentially contestable issues of gender—particularly the implications of gender equality, were often consigned into the realm of *doxa*.[46] *Doxa* is precisely the incontestable, that which is taken for granted: gender issues remained submerged while other political exigencies were being redressed. These struggles tended to utilise traditional orientations so long as they did not conflict with its major priorities. Although sexual exploitation of lower-caste women was regarded as *julum*, in general the position of women remained an uncontested issue because gender was not the object of the struggles against *julum*. The main ideological thrust of these struggles was against the everyday experiences of material and social tyranny and inequalities such as differential access to resources. These could be achieved politically without touching upon women's subordination. So although caste and religion came to acquire distinctly new meanings, popular politics made no change in gender relations: it merely took on the shape of the gender relations that were already in existence.

[46]Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, (Cambridge, 1977).

Chapter 3

"Taking the field": The emergence of popular politics, 1920–1937

This chapter examines the realisation of organised political participation by the kisans and subsequent developments which assisted in the establishment of the Congress Ministry in U.P. in 1937. It focuses upon the meanings of popular politics that led to the growth of *chetna* (political awakening) among the kisans and illustrates how the weight of their political presence radicalised the Congress movement. Official symbols of power were deliberately subverted by the Congress, which posed the possibility of establishing a just social order in opposition to the existing one. By anchoring these pronouncements in the lives and thoughts of the kisans, the Congress movements explored and drew upon all kinds of popular associations with the environment, myths, legends and customs that powerfully influenced everyday actions. More importantly, the local *netas* were able to build upon the emotional resonances which these associations carried by consciously manipulating their expectations and beliefs. This chapter seeks to show how the kisans realised their identities not simply within the framework of the nationalist discourse and official knowledge, but at least as much against it. This was profoundly to affect their understanding of the past and transform their

[0]The phrase "taking the field" was used by many of my informants to describe the politicisation of the kisans.

political identity and capacity for self-expression.

It is necessary to take the role of the early Congress into account in order to trace the growth and maturation of "organised politics".[1] It appears that as early as 1902 in Basti and Gorakhpur, there was a group of prominent district lawyers such as Batti Baba, Sarju Prasad and Lakshmi Narain Tandon who were sympathetic to the ideas of the Congress; some of them attended the annual sessions and bore their own expenses. They were in contact with important lawyers in Allahabad, such as Ajodhyanath, who were making concerted efforts to build a Congress network throughout the United Provinces. Political events such as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, advocation of Home Rule, and the Khilafat movement were discussed by these Congressmen in public places such as the district town hall, the court and public reading rooms. But by and large, the *"vakil* Congress" confined its activities to its own class, living and working in a world apart from the rest of society: the kisan question was not on their immediate agenda.

However, by the 1920s the tenor of politics shifted rather dramatically. The Non-Cooperation Movement in the province generated a tremendous momentum after the "coming of Gandhi".[2] His visit to Gorakhpur in early February 1921 "galvanised the division" and led to the rapid swelling of the movement due to kisan participation in the *kangresiya andolan* (the Congress struggle). His main message was to non-cooperate with the government and emphasis was laid on *satyagraha* (non-violent struggle for the truth) by resigning from government jobs, and boycotting all government institutions such as schools, courts, and offices.

[1]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal and interview with Sheoram Rai, Azamgarh, 8 September 1991.

[2]Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur district, eastern U.P. 1921–2", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, III, (Delhi, 1984), pp. 1–61.

The boycott of foreign goods was also advocated and the use of English goods was strictly forbidden: the main message was to burn foreign cloth and practise *swadeshi*.[3] Central to Gandhi's advocation of Non-Cooperation was the spinning and weaving of *khaddar* (homespun cotton cloth) for achieving self-reliance. The "Gandhi topi" (Gandhi cap) and *khadi* became the mark of a *kangresiya* (a supporter of the Congress, usually referred to a Congress volunteer or leader). Kisan *netas* such as Vishwanath Tripathi and Sheoram Rai suggested that much of the idealism of the 1920s and 1930s was introduced through this movement.[4] They said everyone was invited to participate in the movement and this message was intended to cut right across class and caste barriers stressing the common goal for *swaraj*.

One song captures the symbolism associated with non-cooperation and Gandhi, who is compared to Shiva the destroyer of evil, seen in this context as the avenger against foreign rule. The people are told that they must not remain onlookers but participate in a movement that was sanctified by God:

> Uthho Baarat basi, utho Baarat basi, Gaddijee ka charan dharo rey dharo
>
> Kab ke tum soyo kab ke soyo, abahi sey khyal karo rey karo Ka to charakey ka soota, ka to charakey ta soota kaddar par dhyan, dharo rey dharo.
>
> Siv saakardani, Siv saakar dani kar me tirasul biraji rahi Hath sobhailia damaru, hath sobhaila damaru Lilara cadan biraji ke pith mey

[3]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.

[4]Interviews with Vishwanath Tripathi, Barhaj, Deoria, 26 March 1992 and Sheoram Rai, Azamgarh, 8 February 1992.

Kailbag ka gola, kail bhag ke gola, baithe bailava ke pith mey

Gale muud ka mala, gale muud kamala hath tirasul biraji rahey.[5]

("Arise people of Bharat, touch the feet of Gandhi. How long will you sleep ? How long will you sleep? From now on be alert. Concentrate on homespun cotton and the thread of the spinning wheel. Give up the study of English and learn Hindi. The great Sivshankar with the trident in his hands and the beautifully adorned locks. His forehead is adorned with sandlewood paste and he eats little balls of opium. He sits on the bull's back and there is a necklace of skulls around his throat.")

Oral sources and official records, such as the police abstracts of intelligence, confirm the high pitch of political activity in this region. Countless meetings were held to propagate the new ideology which stressed the need for sacrifice and fearlessness. Many resigned from government posts to join the movement. Among the notable figures who did so were Raghupati Sahai and the novelist Premchand. There were successful lawyers like Bhagwati Dubey, Bindbasini, Awadh Narayan Lala. Many students left the government schools and colleges such as Raja Ram Sharma, Dwaraka Prasad, Sheoram Rai, Vishwanath Mardana and Vishwanath Tripathi, and later became influential *netas*. More significantly, a few chowkidars and a number of policemen belonging to the lower ranks resigned from service. For instance, it was noted that by December 1921, two head constables and 23 policemen joined the movement in Gorakhpur.[6] An important recruit was Tej Bahadur Singh who resigned as a *sepoy* (armed policeman), later became a prominent kisan leader in Azamgarh, and participated in the burning of Tarwa

[5]Interview with Vishwanath Tripathi, Barhaj, 26 March 1992.
[6]Police Abstracts of Intelligence (henceforth PAI) 1921, p. 31.

police station in 1942. The police abstracts of intelligence maintained a count of "the total bag of government servants" drawn into Congress activity.[7]

What were the main political trends discernible in the 1920s? In terms of popular politics, the most powerful feature of these movements for the kisans had been the preaching of fearlessness.[8] Intelligence records noted that meetings were held everywhere and the kisans were told not to fear the authorities and to enlist in the Congress. The size of the average meeting is difficult to estimate, it varied from 100 to 10,000 kisans, depending on the speakers, the time and the location. Much of the rank and file membership was drawn from the lower-castes: Ahirs, Kurmis, Telis, Pasis and Chamars who became committed activists and mobilised a phenomenal grass-roots following for the Congress and thus in U.P. the movement developed the organisational base for a strong network in the countryside. The stress was on their collective identity and the need for *sangathan* (unity) by their leaders: they were frequently addressed as *"kisan bhaiya and bahina"* (kisan brothers and sisters) in the political meetings.

The organisational basis of the movement has, not suprisingly, merited considerable interest. Gyanendra Pandey's analysis of the intensity of the movement in U.P. and its mass character concurs with Bayly's findings that in Agra, Allahabad, Azamgarh and Rae Bareli, small zamindars and *pattidars* formed the organisational basis of the movement in the 1920s and 1930s.[9] However my evidence for Basti and Gorakhpur suggests that it was not always so. Although small zamindars and *pattidars* may have been at the helm of affairs in the District

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 489.

[8] Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.

[9] Gyanendra Pandey, The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926–34: A Study in Imperfect Mobilisation, (Delhi, 1978), pp. 51–2. Also C. A. Bayly, The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad 1880–1920, (Oxford, 1975), pp. 255–58.

Congress Committee and the United Provinces Provincial Congress Committee, they were not responsible for the growth and organisation of the movement in the villages during the early 1920s and the 1930s; the kisans were not interested in their advocation of the Constructive Programme, that is national education, spinning of *khaddar* and so forth. Pandey himself admits that *khaddar* and *swadeshi* did not have much of an impact on the rural classes.[10] Further, Pandey's study of Congress politics in U.P. between 1920–40, illustrates how independent local leaders such as Kalka Prasad's forthright denunciation of Congress policy caused the UPPCC serious discomfort;[11] The ground-work for agitation was laid by the mandal *netas*, and *kartas* some of whom belonged to the lower-castes, such as Chehra Chamar and Tirloki Pasi in Basti. The basic strength of the Congress in the villages and *tahsils* lay in the kisans (not pattidars or petty zamindars) who held about half an acre or more of land which they cultivated. Balbadrinath, a *karta* from Basti noted that was why the agitations for *batai* continued long after the movement was called off by Gandhi. The roots for the ambivalence in the UPPCC's attitude to the kisan question lay in the 1920s—it was not a "transitory phenomenon".[12]

It is necessary to examine how much of this hesitation on the part of the Congress to espouse the kisan question was caused by the widespread and autonomous nature of kisan protest as it developed from the 1920s. Clearly there were few similarities between official Congress ideology and the aspirations of the kisans. Pandey's work largely focuses on the supra-local nature of popular

[10]Pandey, The Ascendancy, p. 65.
[11]Gyanendra Pandey, "A rural base for the Congress: The United Provinces 1920–40" in D.A. Low (ed.), Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917–47, (London, 1977), p. 211.
[12]*Ibid.*

politics.[13] My work focuses much more on the local level, and hence it necessitates an extended discussion of the politicisation of the kisans in 1920s and 1930s. The meanings of *julum* acquired a wider currency on account of the personal engagement of the kisans in the political struggles inspired by their understanding of the Congress which were seen in terms of their own grievances.

New processes came into play laying the ground for new forms of power and knowledge that would henceforth define their class identity and experience, which the kisans described as *chetna* (awakening). They said that political consciousness (like love or intelligence) was not a matter that could be forced upon them from the outside. It had to be within a person and only then could it be awakened: it was not something that could be learnt. Although they may have appeared to be passive victims of coercion, they had an inner understanding of *julum* which they experienced each day in their lives. However, until the 1920s they could not collectively organise against it. That is to say that although their active participation in organised politics was precipitated by the politics of non-cooperation and Gandhi, "their political awakening" or consciousness happened through individual choice.

Millenarianism characterised the early phase of popular politics. It was almost as if the kisans expected "imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly collective salvation" which were distinct millenarian goals where "there [was] an expectation of and preparation for, the coming of supernatural bliss".[14] It has been argued that the belief in the millennium found the strongest support among people who

[13]Gyanendra Pandey, The Ascendancy.

[14]Peter Worsley, The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of the 'Cargo' Cults of Melanesia, (London, 1957), p. 224. He does not confine millenarian to the classical meaning: the coming of Christ followed by a paradise lasting for 1,000 years.

feel themselves to be oppressed and who were longing for deliverance.[15] Often such movements are characterised by devotional piety and collective goals under the aegis of a Prophet, thus millenarianism often plays an integrational role. Further such movements capture a 'moment in history', often a revolutionary phase in popular politics which seeks to reverse the established order and make a final break with tradition itself demanding an immediate end to the underlying tensions and differences within society.[16]

All these features were present in the popular politics during the 1920s. Before this the kisans could not recollect any other time prior to the 1920s (in their own lifetime) where they were organised to act on behalf of their common good or give practical political expression to these interests except in times of crisis. The anti-authoritarian attitudes discernible in the early phase of kisan politics was informed by a millennial consciouness: its content and meanings were derived from a certainity of a new integrity and a regeneration of the world through Gandhi. Despite failures, disappointments and repression, this consciousness continued to feed into an integral part of their stream of thought in U.P. For an early fulfilment of their hopes, time was to become structured and identified with "the coming of Gandhi".[17]

Another important feature of the movement was to court arrest in large numbers—*"jail baro"* (to fill the jails). The Congress took advantage of Gandhi's reputation and used it for propagating the new ideology in their "wanderings

[15]Worsley, The Trumpet, p. 12.

[16]Vittorio Lanternari, The Religions of the Oppressed: A Study of Messianic Cults, (New York, 1963), p. 249.

[17]Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992. It also introduced another noteworthy dimension to kisan politics and their conception of time, which concealed multiple interpretations and experiences of time, so meanings are only assignable in this context.

among the kisans";[18] wherever they went they were received with great enthusiasm by the kisans. The watch-words were not to fear the jail or the police. Women were encouraged to court arrest. A popular chorus in a song echoes a woman urging her female companions and mother to court arrest.

> Chaalu chaalu sakiya, jaile javaiya gey, Chaalu Chaalu matari, jail jehal key javaiya rey.[19]

("Let us go, Let us go friends, let us go to jail; let us go, let us go mother, let us go to jail".)

The Congress and the kisans

The U.P. Congress circulars distributed by the UPPCC provide a sketch-map of the guidelines to be followed in educating the kisans.[20]. For instance, one numbered 28–748, dated 25 February 1922 which was sent to district, town and *tahsil* Congress committees stated that all such committees "must form a regular class in each *muhalla* to inspire confidence and defeat alarmist rumours". They should discuss the news of the day and devise methods of work. It also enjoined that to keep moral and social discipline, the men and women should always be separate and attention should be given to spinning; these traditional moral and social orientations remained, although the politics had changed.

The next step it advocated was popularising the *charkha* and organising the manufacture of *khaddar*. All workers and office-bearers were to learn the spinning and weaving of *khaddar*. Many *ashrams* (spiritual learning centres) sprung up

[18]Jawaharlal Nehru An Autobiography, (London, 1959), p. 56.
[19]Parbi, Sonmara village, Azamgarh said she could recall this song although she did not participate in the Non-Cooperation Movement.
[20]PAI, 1922, p. 394–5.

in villages where the *netas* were resourceful such as that of Baba Raghav Das in Barhaj, Deoria and Swami Satyanand's *ashram* in Dohri Ghat, Azamgarh. National schools were to be organised and the depressed classes were to be given the opportunity for a better life so that they could be induced to send their children to national schools. The circulars also advocated a social boycott of persons who did not obey Congress *panchayat* decisions which were to be governed by public opinion. Every Congress member or sympathiser was to pay one-tenth of his or her annual income to the Tilak-Swaraj Fund and every district was to send 50% of its income to the Provincial Congress Committee.

These were some of the distinct patterns of political activity that were established in the early part of 1920–1 and set a precedent for later movements. The subject of Swadeshi and self-reliance was discussed by the volunteers and villagers were encouraged to picket foreign cloth. Julahas (weavers) were urged to weave *khadi*.[21] The spinning and weaving of *khadi* and the use of *charkha* had distinct political connotations.

The teachings of Gandhi were espoused wholeheartedly by the Congress which is why in many instances these teachings were taken seriously. There were many acts of sacrifice performed by the kisans to follow Gandhi. Balbadrinath was a resident of Bargadwa village, Naugarh *tahsil*. He joined the movement in 1920. In 1922, he accompanied Ram Lakhan of Rohini Have village to Lal Behari Tandon's ashram at Gonda where he learned spinning and weaving. After a few years he tried to open a similar ashram in Barhni bazaar but encountered stiff opposition from the local zamindar, the Choudhary of Dekhari, who did not permit him to use the land as he was like most of the local magnates, anti-Congress. The local

[21]PAI, 1922, p. 833.

Congress leaders Purushottam Das Tandon and Bindeshwari Prasad, arranged a place for his ashram in Pachpade *tahsil*, seventeen miles from his village. Some of the kisans applied themselves with great zeal and learned to spin and weave correctly. Balbadrinath observed that they enjoyed doing these activities, and enlisted more followers. However they incurred the wrath of the local magnates who hired *goondas* to attack them and beat the kisans, causing serious injuries and Kubernath was fatally wounded. The kisans working in the ashram were forced to flee. Singlehandedly, Balbadrinath transferred his ashram to his own village and resumed work with two kisans. The ideals of sacrifice and endurance were to manifest themselves in the lives of some kisans who were mesmerised by "Gandhism" or their perceptions of it.

As Crawley has pointed out, the significance of 1920–21 also lay in the large number of "rudimentary local organisations which assumed too much power under local leaders".[22] They actively encouraged the kisans to subvert the law. The slogan *"jail bharo"* (to fill the jails) was not just a refusal to come to terms with the law but a denunciation of its very existence. A popular form of social protest was the use of mockery. Many songs were composed by local poets during these times which made the colonial administration a subject of ridicule:

Khiladi Lord Reading ne bhi khele,

khel par ab langoti baz Gandhi se woh bazi har bete hain

Nahi zada khuch din karwa do mehmani,

bane volunteer lakhon se, ye rishtedar hain.

[22]W.F. Crawley, "Kisan sabhas and agrarian revolt in the United Provinces 1920–21", Modern Asian Studies, 5, 2, 1971, p. 95.

("Lord Reading's played a game with the loin-cloth weaver Gandhi and lost that round too. For a few days let us utilise the father-in-law's house [the jail], where lakhs become volunteers".)

This verse celebrates the victory of Gandhi (who wore a *khadi* loin-cloth over Lord Reading. In other words, Gandhi had defeated the English yet again, so victory was synonymous with wearing *khadi* and courting arrest. So everyone was exhorted to enlist as volunteers as *swaraj* was near at hand.

The deification of Gandhi

Gandhi had a profound impact on popular consciousness. There were many reasons why he was to be held in the greatest possible reverence by the kisans.[23] His simplicity appealed to their deepest instincts: the slightly clad, stooping figure with his wooden slippers and walking stick, dressed in a *dhoti* rather like the enlightened *sannyasi*. Asceticism has always been a highly rated virtue in Indian culture. Anyone who dressed as a *sadhu* and begged for alms, was almost certainly regarded as having lived a life of privation, and by that virtue was defined as an austere and holy person; he (rarely she) was able to command their instant respect, trust and hospitality.[24] Inspired by this tradition, many political activists during the 1920s and 1930s took the vow of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) to devote all their time and energy to *swaraj*.[25] There was another reason why Gandhi's power was (to remain forever) unchallenged in the countryside. The kisans believed that his authority was derived more from being "spoken through";

[23]Interviews with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 9 February 1992 and Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.

[24]Interview with Jamuna Devi, Barhaj, 7 April 1992.

[25]Interview with Paras Nath Mishra, Lucknow, 15 August 1991, and Ramanand Gupta, Amila village, 2 October 1991.

he was the medium through which other divine powers communicated with them, and his presence acquired mythic proportions. He came to be regarded as a messiah or a prophet with unquestionable access to divinity; his spirit was said to leave his body and move around the country at will and sacrificial offeringswere made to him as though he were a deity. He declared (to no avail), "I am not a God and can do no miracles. I am just an ordinary man."[26] That remark, like the many others he was to make, simply refuelled his charismatic appeal. The kisans believed implicitly in him and "they seemed to expect happenings which would put an end to their long misery".[27]

He emphasised a duty-based conception of morality revolving around benevolence. Unlike other leaders, he was completely absolved from parochial and narrow ties of custom, authority, private and local attachments: to the kisans he was their prophet and God, devoted to the boundless pursuit of their salvation.[28] Even Communist leaders critical of his leadership during the 1940s were forced to acknowledge his overpowering influence on the masses, likening it to the Bhagirathi (another name for the Ganga).[29] Hence there was no sacrifice that was too great for Gandhi: women gave their *suhaag* (wedding) sarees to be burnt because they had been woven with foreign threads, and people gathered to auction their valuables like gold rings and silver plates to raise money for Gandhi. His name was evoked on many occasions creating new mythologies, displacing or supplanting previous ones. Amin has discussed the miracles and marvels which were attributed to him during his visit to Gorakhpur on 8 February, 1921: "His name

[26]Nearly all my informants quoted this remark while discussing Gandhi.
[27]Nehru, An Autobiography, p. 39.
[28]Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1992.
[29]Manmath Nath Gupta, Krantikari Andolan aur Rashtriya Vikas, (Lucknow, 1942), p. 6.

lent itself to all kinds of beliefs, public meetings, pamphlets, and newspapers."[30] For instance, many stories about his divine powers were widely circulated: dried-up wells were suddenly filled with water, and the smoke coming out of the wells had the fragrance of *keora* (perfume), a copy of the Quran was found in a room which had been unopened for a year, bullets turned to water and dead trees came to life because of Gandhi's presence. Anyone who bore ill-will towards Gandhi was punished, such as the King Emperor who had suffered a fatal stroke due to Gandhi's arrest.[31] An Ahir who refused alms to a hermit begging in the name of Gandhi lost his buffaloes and his *gur* supply was destroyed in a fire.

He also came to be interpreted in various ways at the popular level. For instance an intelligence report from neighbouring Bihar describes one version of *surajava* (*swaraj*).[32] In March 1924, a group of women carrying three *lotas* (pots) of water, some rice saplings and branches from a neem tree walked through three villages, and sang that Gandhi raj had given the order to send water from one village to another, repeating a chorus *"bol hari bol"*("Chant the name of God") They said Gandhi raj had given this order and whoever laughed at it would get a sore mouth. They took a broken bit of an *anna*, a quarter *seer* of *neem* and some vermillion and instructed women in the neighbouring villages to do the same. The neem, rice saplings and water symbolised good health, fertility and vitality;[33] popular politics often drew upon diverse elements from the cosmological tradition. It is not surprising that official accounts treated such behaviour with condescension, representing the politicised kisans either as poor deluded fools or perpetrators of evil because they threatened the authority of

[30]Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma"
[31]PAI, 1922, p. 789.
[32]*Ibid.*, 1924, p. 366.
[33]Interview with Shanti, Kotila village, Azamgarh, 19 September 1991.

the colonial state. However, such acts by the kisans represented convictions and commitments to deeper levels of reality: these expressions were related to the changes of the seasons, the gifts and sorrows they brought, and the bounty and rigours of the earth.

These occurrences were not just a common feature of the 1920s but were repeated throughout Gandhi's lifetime, encouraged by the political climate. Nearly all my informants spoke of the powerful influence he exercised over the minds of men and women. Gandhi was able to articulate thoughts and emotions that were immanent in rural society by striking an equation between the social and the spiritual to explain the goals of liberation through honest and moral methods. Above all, he commanded their adoration and respect because he practised what he preached about *satyagraha, dharma, ahimsa* and *tapasya*. All these values were enshrined in the culture and conditioned popular social beliefs and values about human dignity. There was a general tendency to relate human social needs to divine prototypes for solving personal dilemmas, and belief can be more potent than analysis. To the kisans, he fulfilled the essential quality of humanity, which was compassion. One informant recalled these meetings where Gandhi was the principal speaker. The kisans used to gather six or seven hours before the scheduled time and brave the heat or cold just for *"Gaddiji ka darshan"*. They travelled by foot and sometimes walked sixty or seventy miles. Gandhi usually had to address very large audiences (which the police intelligence abstracts referred to as "monster" meetings) varying from 1,000 to 100,000. For instance, on one occasion in Gorakhpur, at Barhalganj, K.D. Malviya and Bindbasini organised a meeting and 100,000 gathered in Ghughli and waited for Gandhi who did not speak because he was offended by their unruly behaviour. In Padrauna,

26,000 gathered and Gandhi was obliged to speak in spite of the confusion. There were no microphones or loudspeakers in those days, so very few heard the speech. In Gandhi's case it did not seem to matter that he spoke in *khari-boli* and not Bhojpuri. The villagers experienced enormous comfort from just being able to see him: wherever he appeared either in the flesh or in spirit, he imposed a certainty on a situation which was characterised by doubts and tremendous anxiety.[34]

He also inspired a new kind of leadership. The terms *neta log* and *kartas* were used frequently by the kisans and the Congress and have an important bearing on the political education that the *kashtkaron* (cultivators) were to receive. These terms acquire entirely new meanings when interpreted within the millenarian context. On account of the heightened awareness of *julum* and the belief in immediate redress, infinite acts of heroism and sacrifice were performed by the kisans, who risked their lives. Yet at the end of such an experience they were tormented by self-doubt and confusion as to how to vanquish their oppressors: the zamindars, police and *patwaris*. These were the tasks they expected their leaders to solve. Local *netas* who had been able to take on the Gandhian garb by acts of selflessness were seen to be akin to Gandhi in spirit and were nicknamed 'Gandhi' of a particular village or a district. The *neta* was vested with considerable trust and their good-will. He explained the meanings of the political demands and listened to them and represented their grievances to the DCC. The kisans believed that he associated with other *netas* and was informed of happenings elsewhere. *Netas* were considered to be highly moral and selfless individuals.

It has been observed that once charismatic leadership has occurred it is capable of periodic recrudescence and could be reactivated. In the early days Gandhi's

[34]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.

name was evoked for many causes: assembling an audience, preaching the doctrine or raising money. In Basti, Daya Shankar, a secretary of the DCC, announced in Sonhan that Gandhi had ordained that people should fast between 6 and 13 April and the money saved should be sent to South Africa "to fight the black laws".[35] The use of Gandhi's name legitimised activities of all kinds and few local *netas* had scruples about using it. For instance, in Azamgarh, Dan Bahadur Singh, a local *neta* and his followers went around Atraulia with a flag and announced by drumbeat that Gandhi had ordered every cultivator to give five seers of grain per plough and others had to contribute eleven rupees for the establishment of a national school.[36] The Superintendant of Police of Azamgarh, observing the impact in March 1922, remarked that, "Gandhism is as dead as Julius Caesar. Any *badmaash* who wants to loot does so in the name of Gandhi (shouting Gandhiji ki jai) and is backed by the villagers".[37] To these officials it represented no more than "the riff-raff of both creeds who are out for an early millenium of no liabilities, cheap food and unlimited license".[38]

From the 1920s onwards, despite Gandhi's methods of political expediency, the kisans imposed a "sanctity" on him. These *netas* were usually *mandal* level Congressmen, and they kept the movement alive in the villages: to the kisan his village *neta* was his only hope. Every village had two or three *netas* and they were assisted by *kartas* (volunteers), who sometimes having attained sufficient political maturity themselves graduated to the ranks of leadership. Although by custom old age was venerated, sometimes there were young leaders and older volunteers and other variables such as the ability to read and write, in addition

[35] *Ibid.*, 1924, p. 308.
[36] *Ibid.*,1922, p. 738.
[37] *Ibid.*, 1922, p. 709.
[38] *Ibid.*, March 1922, p. 489.

to an individual's wisdom and oratorial skills, were regarded as essential for mobilisation. As a rule, the *kartas* were residents of that village or a neighbouring one, communicated in *dehat boli*, and understood the habits and needs of the people. During the land records operation in the 1940s, it was the *kartas* who assisted the kisans in filing claims.

The political understanding of swaraj

The kisans believed that a new society was being conceived and it would be a just one. After all, the Congress had defined itself as a movement against injustice and tyranny and championed the cause of *swaraj*. They pronounced *swaraj* as *surajava* and to them it meant the setting up of Gandhi raj which they equated with kisan raj, that is outright ownership of land, no rents and cancellation of all debts. For instance, on 1 January 1921, in Mohwa bazaar, Tarkulwa, a speaker called Lallan Rai addressing a crowd of 100 people, said that the new creed was to disobey government orders, resign from its service and for kisans not to pay rent.[39] Nothing could have been more at cross purposes with Gandhi's or the provincial Congress's ideology at that time. These ideas illustrate how it was in the nature and interests of popular politics not just to penetrate the self-serving claims of the rulers, but also to subvert the more oppressive elements of domination.

The kisans understood the content of the new teaching by interfacing its form and content according to their world view.[40] They recognised that a new concept of political behaviour was being advocated for achieving social justice by challenging official authority. They had a deep and profound scepticism of

[39]PAI, 1921, p. 31.
[40]Personal communication from Balbadrinath and Ram Shankar Lal.

such authority anyway: it was opposed to the whole conception they had framed of the world and themselves. They believed that the *kangresiyas* were actively forging a movement based on equality and connectedness amongst them. But their understanding and subsequent participation was determined by their own conceptions of justice and social order and not due to the Congress.

The teachings of the Congress emphasised the sinfulness of government service and advocated the boycott of government institutions, which was open to all kinds of interpretation. There was a conscious effort to draw upon shared values and morals in society to propagate the meanings of non-co-operation by contrasting good and evil: the government of Ravana had to be brought down and replaced by *Ram rajya*. Sita (Mother India) had been abducted by the evil demon (English rule) and had to be saved. Various chants were coined, such as "Brittania ki naukri karna haram hai",[41] and kisans were repeatedly taught that *ekta, drudhta, atmatyaag* (unity, determination, self-sacrifice) would give them *sakti*.[42] It is interesting to note how traditional codes of morality which served a contemporary purpose were stressed. The need of the hour was discipline so that the rank and file could be monitored in keeping with Congress ethics. To illustrate unity and impress upon the kisans the meaning of strength, "*swaraj* processions" were organised. Volunteers were enrolled and payment of poor volunteers was also considered. In Azamgarh, the Congress committees were considering paying them four to six annas a day.[43]

One popular song illustrates the meaning of being a *kangresiya*, and the mean-

[41] "To engage in any kind of work with the British government is evil", PAI, February 1921, p. 47.

[42] Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal. These were the watch-words printed on the daily edition of the *Aaj* newspaper.

[43] PAI, 1922, p. 168.

ing of sacrifice. It is sung by a woman who reflects upon her husband's (and her own) commitment to the cause which involved the ultimate sacrifice of ascetism for achieving *surajava* which the kisans essentially interpreted to mean freedom from *julum*.

Raja kangresiya bhailai, jiabai ta haiya na,

jiab ta haiye nahi, jivana ta jei hai nahi;

Binu rey surajava lehale, duarey ta aii haii na jiab ta haiyee niab,
garua ta pi hai nahi;

Binu rey surajava lehale, aganey ta aii haii nahi

Binu rey surajava lehale, birava ta khai hai na,

Binu rey surajava lehale, sejiya par soi hai na.[44]

(A woman voices her fears that "her husband has become a member of the Congress so she could not stay alive (as he had to sacrifice all his time for the movement and the family was punished for his politics). He will not eat cooked food, drink from the water pot or appear at the front door or the courtyard, eat *pan*, or sleep with her on the bed until self rule was achieved.") This song states that a woman and her family had to undergo as much privation and self sacrifice as a man in the struggle for a new and better world.

Most kisans believed this meant that they could challenge all forms of oppressive authority: the police, *chowkidars*, *patwaris*, the zamindars, officialdom and thereby establish a "kisan raj". Some of the more conservative members of the DCC tried to exercise restraint over the kisans but it was not possible: these

[44]Interview with Kamala Devi, wife of Jharkande Rai, Amila village, 9 September 1991. She had heard this song in 1930, but said it could apply to the 1920s.

movements had branched out into several movements against *begar* and *hari*, social reform etc. Kisans were encouraged by their local *netas* in the villages to interpret Gandhi's *vacchan* (oath) in their own terms and thus exercise an automatic authority over the course of events, something that had been previously denied to them. For instance, in addition to the boycott of foreign cloth etc, the kisans also preached a ban on the use of foreign implements, manure and seeds.[45]

There are innumerable examples to illustrate how the kisans set up alternative structures of power in the hope of forging a new society. The main patterns of political activities were aimed to counter official oppression. So policing duties such as setting up *desi-thanas* (local police-stations) manned by "Gandhi's police", taking up watch and ward activities and renaming roads as Congress roads and establishing Congress panchayats for social and criminal redress. In Basti, a Khilafat police station was set up in Kopaganj and a Congress police station in Kotwali. In Azamgarh, Congress *kotwalis* were established and *vakils* and *mukhtars* were asked to suspend their legal practice. On Congress roads the volunteers acted as police, shouting orders and regulating traffic.[46] Some huts of kisans were used as police stations; they were called *desi-thanas* or national police stations. Defiance and anger against the police and other authorities were frequently expressed at these gatherings; the excesses committed by them were condemned and individual reports were filed at the Congress tahsil offices. There was a public platform for expressing tales of woe and suffering meted out by the *goondas* and police. For instance, they condemned the police violence in Shorhatgarh and the *hartal* at Mahson when a panchayat was formed and addressed by

[45]Interview with Sheoram Rai, Azamgarh, 8 September 1991.
[46]PAI, 1921, p. 29.

the officials from the DCC and *kartas* such as Bhagwati of Shorhatgarh.[47] In some villages, sub-inspectors reported that they were receiving threatening letters;[48] elsewhere the beating of police constables was advocated.[49] In an unnamed village, volunteers investigated a burglary case before the arrival of the sub-inspector and arrived at the house of some Chamars saying they were Gandhi's police suggesting how these volunteers had taken the law into their hands.[50]

The affirmation of local solidarities was useful in mobilising dissent. During Kartik Purnima, thousands bathed in the Rapti. Men and women went to *melas* like the *Magh mela* and the *Dadari mela* which drew 300,000 to 400,000 people. Sometimes performing magicians or astrologers (who could draw large crowds) were assigned the task of distributing leaflets or reading them aloud. Pamphlets were distributed and pasted up in important public places and on wayside trees. Such activity was done during bazaar days when crowds of kisans assembled at cattle fairs and *melas*. Other means of communication were mobilised too. There were three printing presses in Gorakhpur—the Hari press, Swadeshi press and the Bharat Prakash.[51] But my informants noted that each district had at least four or five printing presses which had gone underground. Some of them were located in secret locales like *akharas* and temples.[52] Numerous pamphlets were printed and distributed in Devanagari script with Bhojpuri words transcribed in ink. The kisans called these pamphlets *"fatwas"* (literally holy orders) or "Gandhi's letters" which were addressed specifically to them. The armed police burned

[47] *Ibid.*, 1922, pp. 858, 875.
[48] *Ibid.*, 1923, p. 392.
[49] *Ibid.*, 1924, p. 19.
[50] *Ibid.*, 1922, p. 146.
[51] PAI, 1923, p. 42.
[52] Interview with Sheoram Rai, Azamgarh, 8 September 1991.

most of this literature during their frequent raids.[53]

The expression of popular politics had almost by definition to be open and to take place in public spaces. Such political activities were based on local initiatives rather than any kind of *élite* intervention. People gathered at a moment's notice and anyone who had something to say simply got up and addressed the assembly on what he or she believed to be the Congress creed. Women were present in large numbers. Some of the kisans really believed that "Gandhi swaraj" had come and did not quite know how to contain their excitement. They were encouraged by the political strategies employed by the Congress *kartas*: the picketing of important areas in the town such as shops, markets and their propaganda during fairs, festivals etc.[54] The occupation by volunteers of public places such as town halls and particularly of property owned by English planters was another gesture of defiance against authority. Most of the picketing of shops was done by students from the larger towns and village schoolboys. They were joined by kisans as the movement found support in the villages. Sometimes a Congress court was held in troubled areas such as in Padrauna and 5,000 kisans gathered from neighbouring villages to voice their grievances.[55] Volunteers set up camp in local bazaars, for example the case of Tentari bazaar in Basti or the bazaar in Naugarh owned by Mr Peppe.[56] The Chauri Chaura incident had likewise begun with the assembling of kisans from the weekly Mundera bazaar. At these meetings all kinds of local grievances were aired. For instance, in Rudarpur Gurukul, the speakers protested against the local police for entering the schools with their shoes on.[57]

[53]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.
[54]PAI, March 1924, p. 165.
[55]*Ibid.*, p. 165.
[56]*Ibid.*.
[57]*Ibid.*, p. 398.

Popular political activity was also governed by taboos and a defined code of ethics; certain moral strictures were to be followed and self-restraint had to be exercised or there was the inevitable prospect of public dishonour. The ban on liquor and opiates was taken more seriously. In Dohrighat a liquor shop was burnt down by local villagers.[58] In Basti a purchaser of ganja was given a donkey's ride through the town and abuse was hurled at him. In Salempur village, another man was publicly humiliated for drinking *tari*: he was taken around the village with a necklace of shoes and a blackened face.[59] In most areas of the region the ban on alcohol and opium was firmly enforced. Women were particularly supportive of the ban because men often mistreated them under the influence of drink. Many kisans were taught to regard alcoholism as a disease of the mind and body; it was equated with madness, and no one who wanted their land could afford to be mad.[60] In general following prescribed moral codes remained a dominant theme, which continued to be discussed during the 1930s and 1940s.

Certain areas in each district became important focal points of revolt. In the case of Azamgarh they were Mau, Tarwa, Chiriakot, Mohammedpur and Atraulia. In February 1922, the superintendant of police noted that picketing in Atraulia and Chiriakot was "particularly audacious".[61] In Lohra village in Atraulia, the kisan volunteers took an Ahir charged with theft around the village after blackening his face and they sang "objectionable songs". A Congress police station had been set up and a diary was being maintained in which duties were entered. In Bhangpura village, the panchayat had decided that no cases would be

[58] *Ibid.*, 1922, p. 375.

[59] *Ibid.*, 1924, p. 83. Shoes were considered to be extremely polluting; to be condemned to wear a garland of shoes was the worst possible dishonour in a village.

[60] Interview with Rumali, Chilhia village, Shorhatgarh, 10 February 1992.

[61] *Ibid.*, 1922, p. 738.

referred to the police.[62] Chamars were successfully prevented by the *kartas* from taking a nilgai shot by a sub-inspector of Atraulia, and the Julahas summoned to do the job were fined eight annas by the *kartas* for having carried out the sub-inspector's orders. In this district the panchayat movement made rapid strides and new panchayats were formed. In some instances with the collusion of the Arya Samaj, Congress cattle compounds were set up with paid officials.[63] Another reported case in Azamgarh in February 1922 happened in Mubarakpur where a Congress pound was established with two paid officials, the sepoy volunteer was paid Rs 8 and the clerk paid Rs 15.[64] Wherever possible the Congress tried to assist the poor while giving them incentives to join the movement.

There were many ways of trying to educate the kisans and popular entertainment drew large crowds. The *katha* (story) and the *natak* (theatre) were vital elements of the *nautanki* tradition. A typical Congress *katha* began with songs and the beating of drums.[65] Usually the music of the particular season was played with the *dholak* (a drum). But whether it was *pagua* or *kajri*, the tales were often traditional plays peppered with overt political messages. For instance, the story of Raja Harishchandra was a favourite: his honesty in the face of adversity and his sacrifice of his kingdom and family on grounds of a moral principle was related to problems of hunger, death and grinding poverty. The kisans' woes were likened to the raja's who triumphed in the end. It was usually narrated by professional story-tellers (musicians) who were regarded as seers commanding considerable respect. Music arranged to accompany these tales was done through the medium of folk instruments. These narrators had access to the innermost aspirations of

[62] *Ibid.*, 1922, p. 252.
[63] See pp. 190–94 below.
[64] PAI, 1922, p. 414.
[65] Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.

rural society; they wandered from one village to another, and conversed with all and sundry. Their vocabulary was sprinkled with melodies, symbols, images and innuendos drawn from the local culture. By the use of "situational psychology", they exercised considerable intellectual freedom, interpreting a popular tale in any way they choose.[66] There were usually more than two or three speakers.

Such meetings lasted for three or four hours and *nataks* and *kaatputliya* (plays and puppet shows) were often staged. During these times it was never simply entertainment and the performers often "alerted the audience to the present and the unknown".[67] There was "a mobile infinity of tactics" suggesting a knowingness that was both complicit and discriminatory. There was usually active audience participation by the kisans; wherever a perfomance took place, the crowd registered recognition and identification with the performers by asserting its own collective authorship and authority in the performance.[68]

Traditionally *kathas* were narrated in the evenings by village elders. Sometimes village schoolboys also participated by reading tales from the Tulsidas Ramayana or the Mahabharata aloud.[69] Villagers regarded the *katha* tradition as an august institution. The *rathri pathshalas* (police intelligence abstracts called them lantern lectures) were night schools which kisans were encouraged to attend. They were held in the fields. They began at 9 p.m. and ended at 3 a.m. in summer but during the winter months they were held just after darkness had set in. These timings suited the kisans: they did not take up their work hours, hours when they could not get away because the tasks of agriculture were so precious

[66]Interview with Paras Nath Mishra, Lucknow, 12 October 1991.
[67]Peter Bailey "Conspiracies of meaning: Music Hall and the knowingness of popular culture", Past and Present, 144, 1994, pp. 138–170.
[68]*Ibid.*, p. 146.
[69]Swami Sahajanand, Mera Jeevan Sangharsh, (Delhi, 1970), p. 11.

to them. Kisans were taught the Devanagiri alphabet and entertained.

The forms of knowing were not limited to the ideational aspects of the human consciousness but appear to have addressed the sensual, aesthetic, moral and emotional aspects as well. During the 1940s, the Communists formalised the methods of education pioneered by the Congress, and held regular classes.[70] They were particularly successful in converting large sections of the cultivators to adopt the socialist persuasion. With the intensification of repression, the blowing of conch shells or imitating the sounds of birds, such as the parrot, peacock and the owl was used for making secret announcements. The main thrust of the *katha* promised the end of *julum*; after a *katha* all the kisans who were present would take an oath to unite against the zamindar and give mutual help. A small deposit was offered by those who could afford to do so to set up a fund to fight cases in court.

Dangal or wrestling was another popular form of entertainment. During the 1920s and 1930s, the *akharas* have been depicted in official sources and some recent studies on U.P. as a breeding ground for communal conflict.[71] Accounts by kisans (who were schoolboys and youth) during the 1920s and 1930s in the villages suggest that until the late 1940s, *akharas* remained primarily gymnasiums for wrestlng matches and other games. They were places where many a village schoolboy spent four or five hours after school with other boys. Jai Bahadur Singh, a popular kisan leader from Azamgarh, took a particular fancy to this sport and in which he also excelled. Sheetal Tripathi noted that wrestling and local games like *guli danda* were played here. Some men who were good at

[70]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 24 September 1991.

[71]N. Gooptu, "The Political Culture of the Urban Poor: the United Provinces between the Two World Wars", (unpublished PhD thesis), Cambridge, 1992, pp. 144-45.

wrestling coached a few boys for local competitions. The traditional *akharas* played an important role and teachers were recruited from here. It was inevitable for political movements to utilise these popular traditions to widen their appeal. In the wake of the Non-Cooperation Movement, many local organisations sprang up, such as the Quami Seva Dal and the Hindusthani Dal to spread the message of the Congress. Physical fitness classes were set up; wrestling, yoga classes and other forms of training were supervised by professional coaches.[72]

Drill and marching in single file was part of the instruction *kartas* received. The need for physical discipline was deemed essential to achieve *swaraj* by Gandhi. During the 1920s, it was not uncommon for 400 to 500 villagers to parade each day with a bugle. They were trained to drill by ex-policemen who had recently resigned from service. There were regular night patrols by volunteers in various *tahsils*.

Against all odds the kisans actively participated in raising the necessary finances. Funding the movement in the villages was done through grain contributions as kisans simply could not make cash payments. This was done through *chutki* (a handful of cooked grain), *muthiya* (a handful of uncooked grain) and *khaliani* (grain from the threshing floor). Pandey has shown how such contributions by kisan households were prevalent in the Gaurakshini sabhas in Azamgarh during the 1890s, derived in part from popular tradition; further, wherever these funds were collected, a sabha was in force.[73] During the 1920s, many kisan households participated in making these contributions; whether it was weekly or fortnightly, *kartas* made their rounds in each locality and mobilised the support

[72]Interview with Ramanand Gupta, Amila, Azamgarh, 2 October 1991.

[73]Gyanendra Pandey, "Rallying around the cow: Sectarian strife in the Bhojpuri speaking region circa 1888–1917" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, II, (Delhi 1983), p. 81.

of the villagers. In some cases villagers volunteered to feed the *kartas* or *netas*. They were many instances when local produce like *gur* was sold to raise money for the Congress funds.[74] It is important to recognise the powerful effects of Congress activity in the villages. My informants described how the kisans maintained notebooks with lists of volunteers and the kind and amount of grain or *gur* they received from the villagers. They also had a schedule for various kinds of activities to be undertaken, and a record of meetings to be held. Most of these records have been burnt. These records were written in small notebooks and usually buried in the ground to prevent the police from locating them.[75]

The significance of Chauri Chaura

The defiance of the kisans who participated in the Chauri Chaura incident represented the quintessential spirit of those times.[76] Occurring as it did in Gorakhpur, it was to exercise an electrifying impact in eastern U.P. for generations to come.[77] Although the Congress and Gandhi condemned it, for many kisans who at that time believed that *swaraj* had come, it represented a moral victory.

Chauri Chaura can be used to illuminate the nature of popular politics during the 1920s. Almost every kind of action that preceded the attack on the thana had been happening elsewhere. For instance, announcements for a local meeting were often done by drum beat or by word of mouth; in other instances (for wider publicity) letters were written, as in this case. From the exhibits of the trial

[74]PAI, December 1923, p. 81.

[75]Personal communication from Vishwanth Mardana.

[76]Unfortunately I was unable to read Shahid Amin's recent monograph titled Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992 (Delhi, 1995), prior to the completion of this thesis.

[77]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, 7 February 1992.

"Nazir Ali vs the King Emperor" and the actual trial itself, it is possible to construct a fairly accurate description of the politics in the villages.[78] The first exhibit was a notebook containing *chanda wasool* (donations) given during 1920–21. These entries were made by a kisan named Shivran Pasi between 15 December 1920 and 21 December 1921. The items listed in this notebook were mostly contributions of food grains by various volunteers; the main entries comprised different quantities of rice, wheat, grain and *gatta* (parched grain). Below these entries were the names of some volunteers and the area of political activity which included the neighbouring villages of Parsam, Piprahia, Hankapuri, Ahmedpur, Barhaj and Saraiyu. There was also a register of sugar factories with the list of workers in the factory in Dumri *ilaqa* who had provided finacial assistance, such as Mangru Teli who gave eight and a half annas and Kripa Kurmi who gave 9 annas or half a *seer* of *atta* (wheat flour). This illustrates how the kisans maintained written records of contributions for funding the movement entirely of their own accord and often independent of the DCC. There was also a list of the number of Congress volunteers in each *tahsil* to gauge the size of the movement. For instance, the numbers of volunteer contacts listed was as follows: 546 in Sadr Maharajganj, 2342 in Bansgaon, 62 in Deoria and 836 in Gorakhpur city. It indicates the degree of commitment, sacrifice and subterfuge such activity required; these records were buried under-ground in secret hideouts, and procured after torturing the kisans. There were many *kartas* whose names were not listed to avoid identification.

Often meetings were held for specific purposes, usually for immediate redress of grievances that were widely felt. In this case it was to condemn police

[78]Gorakhpur Sessions court, Evidence from Judgement Trial 51 (Chauri Chaura), 30 April 1923.

brutality—the *daroga* of Chaura for beating a *karta* named Bhagwan Mahadeo. It was scheduled for the following Friday on a mound at Chaura. The letter was written in Urdu, by Nakched, a kisan on behalf of the Dumri Congress Committee and copies of it were sold by Nazir Ali for 2 paise and 4 paise to Lal Mohammed and Shikari as "they [were] Gandhi's letters to be read by all and returned to Gandhi when he asked for it". The letter ran thus:

> Volunteer khoj khoj kar marte hain so aap logon ke pas jitney volunteer ko sanichar ko Dumri mein saware ana so ham log thana par chalenge aur daroga ji sey jawab karenge ki kya kusur hai ham log volunteer ko marte aur sab ko marte aur sab ko marnea ho qaid karna ho to sab ehahi bar mardein aur mundera bazar mein macchili ghost band karen.

("The police are searching for volunteers and beating them. So please summon however many volunteers and meet in Dumri on Friday morning so that we can go to the thana and ask the Sub-Inspector to explain such behaviour, and also state that if he wishes to beat one of us he must beat and arrest all of us together. They must stop the sale of meat and fish in Mundera bazaar.")

They sent copies of this letter to the UPPCC and the DCC inviting volunteers from the villages of Piprahiya, Barhampur, Rajdhani, Parari and Kusumuhi to meet on 4 February, 1922. Abdullah, Sukhi and others enrolled the support of villagers. They proclaimed that kisans who refused to become volunteers would have their huts and fields taken away from them when *surajava* came. They should grow cotton, spin yarn, make *khaddar* and wear it. They should settle quarrels amongst themselves and not go to the thana. No-one should drink *tari* or other spirits and should prevent anyone else from doing so as well. One

speaker titled Panditji, said they should speak the truth, not go to councils, or give evidence in the courts. They should love one another: no-one should be considered an enemy or be harmed.[79]

The meeting was held as planned. The kisans were to question the *daroga* and also demand that the ban on the sale of meat and hides at Chaura on market days in Hata (Wednesday and Saturday) be enforced. Hakim, Muhammed Lalsa and Bhagwati Bania were nominated on the spot as secretary, second secretary and treasurer for the occasion by the kisans. They were given garlands of marigolds in honour of their new status. About 4,000 kisans had gathered and they were addressed by the officers. Nazir Ali said that anyone who feared bullets would defile his mother and sister. Bhagwan, another kisan, organised a drill and by shouting instructions made the kisans march in lines, using a whistle to stop them when he thought necessary. The march was to be peaceful and 2,500 to 3,000 kisans walked towards the thana singing songs and shouting "Gandhi Maharaj ki jai". Many of them were wearing *gherua vastar* (ochre-coloured cloth) which was the colour of religious men. On the way to the thana, they stopped the village headman Bhawani Prasad Mukhia and advised him to resign because they were to going to hold a Gandhi panchayat. Otherwise he would have to face social ostracism. When the procession reached the thana, one of the men addressed the *daroga*. It was claimed that he did not adopt the servile form of address like *Huzuur* or *salaam*.[80] The account of the attack on the thana is biased. The kisans were blamed for starting the violence. Some locals noted that that it may well have been self-defence that prompted the kisans to arm themselves with whatever they found handy from *kankats, dhelas, marmar aaktas* (bricks, mud-

[79] *Ibid.*
[80] *Ibid*

cakes, stones) to *labdas* (pebbles), *chailas* (cooking vessels) and *dandas* (wooden sticks). The police started to fire at the crowd and a fire set the station ablaze; several policemen were killed in the confrontation. Shortly after, 225 kisans were arrested and charged under sections 120 B, 147, 302, 395, 439 CPC.

Chauri Chaura can be regarded as a turning point not just in terms of popular politics, but also in the perceptions of kisan politics by the Congress and the colonial government. The court ruled that the kisans "agreed to do illegal acts, to wit, among themselves, and overawe the police force...".[81] Amin notes that despite its political character, there was a pronounced tendency not just on the part of the officials but also the higher echelons in the Congress "to criminalise it".[82]

Although the Non-Cooperation Movement inspired by Gandhi's demi-god status was largely blamed in official records for the incident at Chauri Chaura, it was far from the truth. Amin notes also that the Congress discourse did not attempt to contextualise "the crime of Gorakhpur within any kind of political activity".[83] On the contrary it sought to delimit "true" Congress politics by distancing the DCC in Gorakhpur from the Dumri MCC; the latter was condemned for specific acts of Chauri Chaura as the account from the evidence of Dasrath Dwivedi (editor of the *Swadesh*) suggests. He criticised the Dumri MCC and their political activities by stating they operated "in an unauthorised way" and added that most of them were illiterate and were of low class.[84] There was a distinct divide between the grassroots politics of the kisans, and that of the DCC.

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[81] *Ibid.*

[82] Shahid Amin, "Approver's testimony, judicial discourse: The case of Chauri Chaura", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, V, (Delhi, 1987), p. 201.

[83] *Ibid.*, pp. 198–99.

[84] *Ibid.*

The Congress high command could not be just content with dismissing the radical tone of the kisan politics; it also had serious reservations about it. The conservative and more powerful elements of the Congress sought to define "true Congress activity" by criticising the radicalism of the kisans; they were strongly opposed to a Congress led by the lower-caste and landless kisans. In Gorakhpur, the DCC discharged 5,000 villagers out of the 7,000 because they were regarded as unsuitable and only the literate members were regarded as reliable.[85] Disciplinary action was meted out to any member who was believed to be stepping out of line. The UPPCC recognised that the movement had got out of hand; there were movements within the movement which had propelled it beyond the parameters of the Congress creed. But had the ideology of the Congress ever been taken as it was intended? Although many enrolled in the Non-Cooperation Movement, very few kisans formally signed the Congress pledge. After Chauri Chaura, Gandhi lamented in a letter to Nehru that although 36,000 volunteers had joined the movement in Gorakhpur city, less than a hundred actually conformed to the pledge.[86] Gandhi's message of *swaraj* did not intend to do away with the caste system. As one leader explained, it meant that the lower-castes were to be treated as fellow human beings; no one expected them to marry their daughters or to dine with them.[87] Although Gandhi called the spinning wheel "the karma yoga of our age", very few kisans could afford to wear *khaddar*, let alone spin or weave it. It was very expensive and took an entire week to spin and weave a dhoti from raw yarn. A saree cost Rs 35 and only the upper-castes could afford it. However much *khadi* represented self-reliance in ideational terms, weaving it (as much as

[85]PAI, March 1922, p. 581.
[86]S. Bakshi, Documents of the Non-Cooperation Movement (Delhi, 1989), p. 386.
[87]*Ibid.*, p. 203.

wearing it), proved difficult to realise in practice.[88]

The distinct divide between kisan politics and Congress nationalism was recognised by important Congressmen such as Nehru. He pointed out that the two movements, "Non-Cooperation and agrarian were quite separate, though they overlapped and influenced each other..."[89] Gandhi's remark is also revealing, "I do not rely merely on the lawyer class or highly educated men to carry out all the stages of non-cooperation. My hope is now with the masses. My faith in the people is boundless".[90] So "the people" mattered, although their political participation was to be kept within a Congress agenda. The Congress high command, never sought to to advance kisan radicalism and when it did happen, it closed ranks by curbing the radical elements—a pattern that was repeated during the1930s and 1940s. In contrast, the kisans viewed the Non-Cooperation Movement in their own terms—it was the vehicle to express openly their woes and misgivings, transforming their political identity.

By the 1930s, the process of consolidation of the Congress organisation meant that revolutionary tendencies were not just assimilated, but also to be severely constrained.[91] The early rift between the popular politics of the kisans and the "high politics" of "the Congress" can be discerned from the 1920s. The conservative section of the Congress in the UPPCC, and certain members of the DCC and even the *tahsil* committees believed that political expression was to be constructed, implemented and controlled within their dictates. It was the dominant section of the UPPCC, the majority being landholders, and they wished to appease the zamindars. They declared that the Congress had no designs against

[88]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.
[89]Nehru, An Autobiography, p. 59.
[90]Dennis Dalton, Mahatma Gandhi: Non-Violent Power in Action, (New York, 1993), p. 31.
[91]Sumit Sarkar, Modern India: 1885–1947, (Delhi, 1983), pp. 254–55.

them and where tenants had grievances, matters would be settled by mutual consultation and arbitration. It further stated that only persons of approved character specially selected by the Congress committee should be employed. The "onward marching army must now halt and review its future strategy": to conservative Congressmen, the political weight of the kisans was a threat to the integrity of the Congress.

It is not surprising, as Pandey has noted that, despite the severity of the land problem, until the 1930s, there was no proper analysis of the forces and contradictions in Indian society by the UPPCC.[92] Although many local leaders made concerted efforts to obtain extensive popular participation during the Non-Cooperation and the Civil Disobedience Movements it was not until 1931 in U.P., that the Congress produced its first major report on the agrarian situation in the province and that was more an account of incidents of police brutality on the kisans rather than an analysis of rural society.[93] Only in later years was the need for a detailed study recognised and in 1936 the provincial Congress began a serious investigation of socio-economic structure in the countryside which later led to the call for zamindari abolition, a great reduction of rent, exemption of uneconomic holdings from rent, abolition of feudal dues and illegal levies, rural indebtedness and the introduction of cooperative farming.[94]

The official reaction to politcal unrest led to severe counter-insurgency measures. The administration was alarmed by the intense pace of political activity. In the police abstracts of 1921, it was reported that on the average twenty-five meetings were held in every *tahsil* each week. However, according to three of

[92]Gyanendra Pandey, "A rural base for the Congress", pp. 199–223.
[93]*Ibid.*, p. 215.
[94]Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report 1936, p. 133, also *Aaj*, 1 April 1936.

my informants, an average of forty to forty-five meetings was held each week throughout 1920–22. They believed that it was difficult to monitor the number of such meetings because they were held in all kinds of places such as fields, settlements, market places, fairs, village schools and temples.[95] The police had been ordered by the authorities to crush the movement in every possible way. All Congress *kartas* and their kisan followers were instructed to be prepared for death by shooting or a beating by the police in collusion with the local *goondas*. A common complaint against the administration was police brutality.

The repression that followed Chauri Chaura was particularly traumatic in this region. For instance, in Khalilabad, 250 to 300 armed police looted shops and terrorised the people. Congress offices were pulled down and several arrests made at random. Nearly all the leaders were imprisoned.[96] It has been observed that terror is a two-edged weapon, possessing the germs of both escalation and control: measures to counter insurgency only propelled these movements to greater levels of ferocity. For instance, on 18 February 1922, 4,000 volunteers assembled outside the police station in Khalilabad to defy the order of section 144 CPC.[97] Gopi Koeri of Tarkulwa and Masud Ali led the assembly, which threatened to attack the police station but a strong police force under a deputy inspector prevented that from happening. This meeting caused anxiety among the relatives of the policemen.[98] Elsewhere in Azamgarh, 5,000 gathered at Mau and asked the kisans to prepare for civil disobedience.[99] In general, most of the evidence suggests that

[95]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal and Balbadrinath who said that groups of four or five kisans met sometimes and discussed matters, and at other times, twenty or more gathered at a moment's notice.

[96]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.

[97]PAI, February 1922, p. 330.

[98]*Ibid.*, p. 335.

[99]*Ibid.* p. 336.

Chauri Chaura was celebrated as a victory by the kisans and these feelings were encouraged by the self-appointed local leaders. For instance, in Chaukari village, Azamgarh, 250 kisans attended a sabha on 13 March, 1922 where Madho Singh and Gyan Das said that the government was mistaken in imagining the movement could be killed by arresting the leaders after Chauri Chaura. Since Gandhi had been arrested they must not care if there were several such occurrences, because three volunteers were a match for 3,000 policemen.[100]

The Congress was vilified by the colonial state and charged with sedition and its activities were monitored very closely—village leaders and volunteers were targets and the *"badmaash"* register (the village crime notebook) illuminates just how these villagers and their families were terrorised by the local police. An entry made in the *badmaash* register was not removed until his or her death and often future generations of the same family were not considered "above suspicion".[101] Further, this information was made accessible to the zamindar's private army of *goondas* who were often members of the Aman Sabha.

The Aman Sabha had been organised in each district by the zamindars and other prominent men with the active help of the district officials.[102] Its *raison d'être* was to sabotage and crush the Congress movement. In Basti, it was reported that the Raja of Mahson and Jaswinder Nand, a civil surgeon, had set it up.[103] The zamindars' men wore coloured turbans by which it was possible to identify whose men they were. Raja Shivapati Singh of Shorhatgarh was the President of the Basti Aman Sabha. It consisted of zamindars, district officials,

[100] *Ibid.*, March 1922, p. 525.
[101] Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 12 March 1992.
[102] Milton Israel, Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle 1920–47, (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 41–42.
[103] Richard Johnston, Private papers, South Asian Studies Centre, Cambridge.

loyalists, *goondas* and armed police. All kinds of gruesome methods of torture was employed. Kisans were beaten senseless with *lathis* or rifles; some had their teeth removed or their eyes were gouged out, and then they were dropped into the icy waters of the nearest river, be it the Rapti, Kuano, Ami, Tons or the Ghagra. Even women and children were not spared. It was difficult to locate the Congress offices, and when they were found to be in a kisan's *kutia* or any other place, it was pulled apart and usually burned. All the belongings of the kisans would be confiscated. Jewellry was forcibly removed from the women. Anyone found to be wearing *khaddar* was not spared.[104] These atrocities committed by the police and the zamindar's armed police were previously investigated by Congressmen like Devdas Gandhi in 1922. Subhanullah, a *rais* from Gorakhpur assisted him. Shakir Ali, an MLA from the district, proposed a resolution for an enquiry to be held. The petition was dismissed. A charge sheet was drawn up by Malaviya against many policemen and zamindars. The government refuted all charges as baseless and refused to dwell on the matter and Section 144 CPC was imposed in the region. Violence was not just a means to an end but became firmly entrenced in the political culture.

The government never admitted its wrong-doings and took cover in subterfuge. In addition to the Aman Sabha, the administration under Hailey was keen to muzzle all attempts by the Congress to widen its propaganda.[105] There were clandestine forms of official subsidy. For instance, in 1928–30 Malcolm Hailey employed secret service funds for the purchase of the Pioneer newpaper to foil a bid by the Congress. The government finally succeeded in buying out the

[104]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal and Singhasan Singh.
[105]Israel, Communications, p. 42.

Pioneer.[106] Needless to say, these developments in controlling the media were employed to criticise and constrain popular politics.

However, innumerable atrocities continued to be committed on the kisans. The Aman Sabha, fearful of the growing political presence of the kisan movements, attempted to enlist their help by promising them concessions in cloth, kerosene oil, cheap grain, gun licenses and remissions in rent.[107] But they were not successful with the kisans, who mistrusted them and avoided any entanglement with such authorities.

A new social order?

Almost all the local *netas* speak of the powerful influence of the Arya Samaj in their lives. Many of them credit it with initiating them into "nationalist" politics; nearly all of them had taken part in Arya Samaj *jatras* (processions) during their adolescence. Although its influence was not particularly strong in eastern U.P., apart from Azamgarh, its association with Congress politics gave it a certain impetus and widened its appeal to the intelligentsia.[108] The *Satyarth Prakash* criticised not only the English laws and justice, but also the English language. Village school-teachers believed it to be a progressive ideology because it attacked idol worship and "obscurantism" which they defined as blind fear of wandering spirits etc; to village boys, its appeal lay in its nationalism, its emphasis on the freedom of knowledge, its attack of the caste system and its preaching a return "to

[106]Peter Reeves," Landlords and party politics in U.P. 1934–7" in D.A. Low (ed.), Soundings in Modern South Asian History, (London, 1968), pp. 264–5, also cited in John Cell, Malcolm Hailey: A Study of British Imperialism, 1872–1969 (Cambridge, 1992), p. 158.

[107]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal

[108]Satyaketu and Haridutt Vidyalankar, Arya Samaj Ka Itihas, vol. II, (Delhi, 1988), p. 591.

the pristine society of the Vedas" as opposed to the present oppressive society.[109] What many kisan leaders did not see was the dangers inherent in this form of Hindu revivalism.

Its main activities revolved around *vedic prachar*, the setting up of *gurukuls* and *vidyalayas* and cow protection. Large meeting places were an integral part of its propaganda.[110] Its impact in the villages was twofold: many village boys were initiated into Congress politics through the teachings of the Arya Samaj and also inspired by it. Ramanand Gupta, a member of the Revolutionary Socialist Party said he was a firm believer in Durga and worshipped idols but under the influence of the Arya Samaj he gave it up. Secondly, although this region was richer in "Hindu associations than in Muslim ones";[111] many kisans, whether they were "Hindu" or "Muslim", often worshipped common deities and had common rituals. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the religious identity of the kisans was chiefly characterised by worshipping the elements of nature. By actively discouraging all forms of popular worship such as the worship of Ghazi Mian, and even Sheetala Mai and deeming them to be obscurantist, the religious practices of the Arya Samaj favoured a distinct communal consciousness.

It is significant how the Arya Samaj allied itself closely to the Congress movement and introduced the issue of cow protection along with other political issues;[112] it was almost as if it intended the audience as a congregation rather

[109]Not many realised that Dayanand regarded everything that was written after the Vedas as worthless. For instance, he rejected the authority of the some of the Puranas and the Gita which are integral to Hindu philosophy.

[110]Gyanendra Pandey, "Which of us are Hindus?", in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity In India Today, (Delhi, 1993), pp. 242–3.

[111]Gyanendra Pandey, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India (Delhi, 1990), Introduction.

[112]Interviews with Sheoram Rai, Azamgarh, 8 September 1991 and Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.

than a secular public. The Gaurakshini sabhas of the 1880s were a precursor of things to come.[113] The setting up of Congress pounds to guard cows during the panchayat movement of the 1920s is one example.[114] Another issue was *shuddhi* or converting as many Muslims as possible, and others, into the Hindu fold. Although the Arya Samaj defined itself as the new face of the Hindu creed, it was alien to the spirit and general understanding of religion. To quote an example, it was critical of the formlessness and indefiniteness of Hinduism which preached that salvation can be reached by different paths, so a good Muslim and a Christian, or one who was neither had as much a chance of "being saved" as a good Hindu.[115] The Arya Samaj was distinctly opposed to this idea and only a good *Arya* could be saved or one who reconverted himself or herself from any other faith. It borrowed important elements from Christian and Islamic theology, such as the belief in objective truths, a liturgy, the appointment of "clerics", with missionaries to convert as many non believers as possible to its righteous path. For instance, many pamphlets were written opposing the Quran such as, *"Quran zabt ho ya Satyarth Prakash ?"*;[116] through its interpretation of Hindu religion, it remained opposed to Islam and Christianity and advocated that everyone could become an Arya and follow the Vedas. So, although, the Arya Samaj was not popular among the kisans, its serious association with Congress politics influenced local politics during the 1940s and 1950s.

The spirit of fearlessness in politics encouraged a spirit of enquiry in other areas. Kisans were prepared to hear criticism against their religious and social

[113]Gyanendra Pandey, "Rallying around the cow", pp. 63–129.
[114]PAI, 1922, p. 230.
[115]Lala Lajpat Rai, The Arya Samaj: An Account of its Aim, Doctrine and Activities with a Biograhical Sketch of its Founder (London, 1929), Introduction by Sidney Webb.
[116]PAI, 1929, p. 398.

beliefs and began to question their place in the general scheme of things: self-assertion necessitated self-upliftment. Caste and religious reform movements were an important feature of the mid 1920s. Although women's subordination was an important issue, gender issues were not taken up with the same degree of enthusiasm as caste and religious matters were. It was held by leaders such as Moti Lal Nehru that all women be treated as sisters and mothers as enunciated by tradition and very few questioned that sentiment. One kisan woman activist said that surviving was so difficult in those times, as everyone was affected by acute poverty, starvation and the weakness of the spirit, that such hardships assumed priority in the general scheme of things.[117] Besides, among the lower-castes, there were less gender inequalities. However, both women and men were concerned with dignity and honour and they welcomed all efforts to remove the stigma of untouchability and ill-treatment.

The ritual breaking of social taboos was a powerful mechanism towards over-throwing all bonds with the past; it also generated tremendous emotional energy by its deliberate challenge to the social order; customary taboos were being openly questioned everywhere.[118] Not only were hierarchies of caste being challenged but caste practices were also being questioned. Various low-caste panchayats sought to improve the status of their communities and practise social reform: wearing the sacred thread (*janeo*), reciting the Gayatri *mantra* chant which was the prerogative of the *dwija* (twice-born), performing the *homa* (offerings), education of the children and redefining traditional roles. Some local leaders, such as Swami Satyanand, had set up *ashrams* to further the cause of the lower castes and ed-

[117]Interview with Parbi, Sonmara village, Azamgarh, 18 January 1992.
[118]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Vijaypal Chamar Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.

ucated them. They were taught to spin, weave and were allowed to practise the ritual rights of the upper-castes.

Elsewhere many lower-caste groups were redefining their roles: panchayats of the Kahar and Nai castes sought moral improvement and social reform of their communities.[119] At an Ahir sabha in Azamgarh, speakers ruled against child marriage and 4,200 sacred threads were distributed.[120] At another gathering speakers advised all those present to wear the *janeo*. Elsewhere a Chamar *sabha* met and asked its audience to stop *begar* and support cow protection;[121] at another meeting an audience consisting of 2,000 Chamars was advised not to eat meat or sell cattle to the butchers.[122] The Ahirs of Kursaura village decided that their young women must not sell milk in the city.[123] They were advised not to commit theft or give manure for the zamindars' fields.[124] The Kurmis of Ghosi had decided they were Kshatriyas and could wear the sacred thread and so on.[125] In Basti, Swami Acchukarnath and Shyam Lal Dhobi of Allahabad addressed an audience of 300 Chamars and Khatiks. They reminded them that they were the original rulers of India, although the government was inclined to favour the upper-castes.[126] It is important to note that while many lower-castes were seeking "to reform from within", their economic status remained unchanged. Above all the zamindars deeply resented any form of self-assertion by the kisans.

Further, such movements for caste reform, removal of untouchability and reassertion of religious idenitity need to be understood in the context of popular

[119]PAI, 1927, p. 93.
[120]*Ibid.*, 1928, p. 98.
[121]*Ibid.*, 1924, p. 72.
[122]*Ibid.*, p. 90.
[123]*Ibid.*, May 1926, p. 309.
[124]*Ibid.*, 1928, p. 36.
[125]*Ibid.*, p. 533.
[126]*Ibid.*, p. 231.

politics. Pandey has argued that caste reform was distinctly informed by class consciousness: the strength of caste feeling and organisation was employed to further class interests among groups of people belonging to the same caste which sometimes led to the setting up of kisan sabhas. Further, Gyanendra Pandey notes that the Kurmis, Ahirs and Koeris became better organised and increasingly militant in pressing their demands for a more responsible status. Many upper-caste Hindus and Muslims joined hands against the "upstart peasants" through innumerable atrocities such as pillaging of villages, rape and other forms of physical torture.[127] Religious conflict was not a prominent issue until the 1940s; there were activities that occasionally caused tensions during religious festivals in the small towns, but these did not impinge upon the daily lives of the kisans who were preoccupied with the difficulties of eking out an existence: to them, such tensions assumed an irrelevance which some Arya Samajists and others regarded as a sign of irreverence. Although these "reform movements" were a significant feature of the 1920s and 1930s, they did little to improve the economic conditions of the kisans: it was the agitation for land rights that remained central in the struggles against *julum*.

The changing tide: outside the Congress

In contrast to the earlier period discussed above, a noticeable trend in political participation from the late twenties onwards was the primacy given to issues dealing with land rights. In terms of popular politics, kisans, inevitably, eagerly responded to any attempt to resolve the land problem, but they remained lukewarm (if not a little distant), to "nationalist" issues which emphasised general ed-

[127]Pandey, The Construction of Communalism, pp. 198–200.

ucation and social reform. This was typical of the "high politics" of the Congress which some *netas* had come to regard as "enlightened window dressing".[128] For instance, the constructive programme advocated by the Congress had become increasingly irrelevant to the kisans: they hardly had clothes to wear or any independent income or time at their disposal to spin and weave khadi which was, anyway, far too expensive to buy. In fact, many local *netas* in the villages began to work independently of the DCC. For instance, the autonomy of the MCC worried some Congressmen.[129] In 1936, the secretary of the DCC in Basti, Ram Shankar wrote to Jairam Das Daulatram who was the convenor of the primary mass committee. He requested help to procure the services of trained and disciplined workers. Thus villagers would have the benefit of utilising libraries with newspapers describing the Congress activities. He felt that these primary committees should identify themselves with the popular kisan agiations and help to solve their grievances. As things stood, the MCCs were not taking part in the discussions of the policies, programmes and resolutions of the Congress. As a result of these developments, Congress politics also changed. By the mid 1930s, the conservative elements in the UPPCC were forced to "go under" as the party espoused radical agrarian reform.[130]

From the mid-1920s, kisans began to recognise the advantages of autonomous, concerted action by representing their grievances to the kisan sabha. The organisational links of these grassroots kisan sabhas with the Congress remained, if anything, tenuous and distant. The kisan sabha was a loose gathering of kisans

[128]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal, and interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 24 September 1991.

[129]Rajendra Prasad papers, NAI, File (IX/36), letter from Ram Shankar Lal to Jairam Das Daulatram dated 28 June 1936.

[130]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.

who met to redress immediate, common grievances dealing with the land problem and zamindari *julum*. At the grass roots it was a radical on-going organisation which made discerning use of Congress symbolism, and went under during official repression. It was controlled largely by the kisan *netas* who believed they had the backing of the Congress, although the official Congress had very little to do with it and was often unaware of its existence in the locality. The local kisan sabhas were not linked to the All India Kisan Sabha which was formed in 1936. It would be appropriate to note that just as they were many representations of the Congress, they remained many representations of the kisan sabha, the character of which was determined by its composition and ideology. Although the kisan sabhas were set up to represent the class interests of the kisans, constraints were imposed by conservative (and sometimes dominant) elements in the DCC. This often led to serious rifts during the 1930s and 1940s.

However it cannot be denied that the kisan sabhas were a consequence of popular politics. Many *mandal* offices had sprung up as a result of kisan politicisation during the 1920s. Ever so often the most capable kisans took charge of political work. Without their presence, it would have been impossible to keep the organisation alive in the countryside; the severity of repression had instilled a fear "which was greater than the plague" in many kisan households.[131] However, the agitations for *batai* continued in certain areas and had far-reaching consequences. For instance, in northern Basti there were some prominent kisan leaders who formed the kisan sabhas such as Bishwanath Mukherji, Swami Sacchitanand and Vishambhar Dayal Tripathi who assisted the local kisan leaders from time to time. This had happened in the villages of Pathardevariya, Dadul, Badul Ghan-

[131]Personal communication from Balbadrinath.

rawa, Barhni and Bohti since 1923. The local *netas*, such as Pateshwari Yadav, Manraj, Gappu Chamar, Ram Asawar and Chavvi Lal of Naugarh *tahsil* were responsible for re-organising the movement. To help them, Bishwanath Mukherji asked the officials to measure the land area and examine rent claims; in one case, the maximum rent was Rs 4 but the zamindar charged Rs 19. This had led to large scale eviction, and a local *neta* Devkhali of Devkhali Khurd, who owned eight acres, was evicted. In the past, kisans simply ran away to Nepal to flee these exactions because they were unable to provide for their starving families. They were now prepared to unite and fight for their rights.[132]

Intelligence records report that several kisan sabhas were held throughout the region depending on the local leaders and organisation. In the villages the main issue that mobilised the kisans was *Chuut ka andolan* (No rent campaigns). A few women leaders emerged like Sukh Devi, who advocated non-payment of rent in Basti.[133] Many kisans were mobilised on this issue and several acts of bravery were recorded. For instance, in Kotila village, Azamgarh, two tenants who had been ejected by the zamindar of Birapur refused to leave their fields, and lay down in front of the plough, obliging the ploughman to stop.[134] Sometimes *panches* were elected on the spot to address local grievances committed by the police, *patwaris, karindas, chowkidars* and others. Attending these meetings in large numbers gave the kisans a tremendous sense of hope.[135] Women actively participated in kisan sabha meetings. Sometimes they addressed the sabhas and aired their grievances. This was a common occurrence during the 1930s. An unnamed kisan woman complained to the gathering that under the existing laws the landlord

[132]Personal communication from Balbadrinath.
[133]PAI, January 1933, p. 97.
[134]*Ibid.*, 1929, p. 267.
[135]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 20 October 1991.

could dispossess a dead kisan's children of their rightful claim to land. She spoke out against the practice of exacting *begar* and *hari*, and blamed the government for wilful neglect. Many married women accompanied the men. Unmarried girls were usually left at home with the grandparents. Their families feared reprisal from the authorities.[136] Wherever the kisan sabha was strong, kisans joined these agitations against *batai*; one form of participation was the *jatha*, when a few hundred or more kisans would walk in double-file or triple-file through the village either in the early hours of the morning or late afternoon, singing *bhajans* as they took out *pheras* (procession carrying lighted-lamps). Often bystanders joined the procession. After the kisans had reached their destination, a sabha was held, a *katha* was recited and *gur* was distributed.

It was never easy to hold a kisan sabha; frequently there was opposition from the authorities, usually the police or the zamindar. It got worse during the elections when there was open confrontation. For instance, in one sabha, held on 18 November 1936 in Deoria, near the Uska thana, *netas* such as Munneshwar Ojha and Ram Autar Sonar, attended the meeting along with thirty kisans. Ram Prasad asked the people to vote for the Congress but the zamindar, named *Dukh Choor* Singh, interrupted and asked him not to hold any meetings in his zamindari, without prior permission from the Collector and a notification to the local police. However, he was sent away by the kisan leaders. He had charged Munneshwar Ojha under Section 332 CPC. However, the kisan leaders informed him that 75% of the kisans were in favour of the Congress.[137]

The Congress held different meanings for different social groups, an expression of different hopes and expectations. For instance, kisan *netas* in the villages who

[136]Interview with Jaggi Devi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 9 February 1992.
[137]PAI, 1936, p. 914.

defined themselves as Congressmen equated Congress rule with kisan raj, while the DCC was divided on that issue and often in a state of discord. In fact, the support of the DCC for the kisan movements was ambivalent because these movements depended on the *netas* in the villages and *tahsil*. In some places, where there were strong kisan leaders, such as Shibbanlal Saxena in Maharajganj and Vishambhar Dayal Tripathi in Unao, the kisan sabha broke away from the DCC.[138] This point about the anti-kisan attitude of the DCC can be illustrated by the action of Bishwanath Mukherji made a complaint in the Legislative Assembly reporting that seven workers had been injured in Gorakhpur on 15 September 1928. He was supporting Rajdhari Rai and seven others who filed a law case against Shyam Sunder Tewari, the *peshkar* of the Tamokhi estate and the Babus of Madhopur. A meeting was organised and 200 to 300 tenants and other kisans gathered at Pathardevariya to discuss the failure of crops in Maharajganj in the previous year, that is, 1927.[139] None of the kisans was armed. During the speech Sham Sundar Tewari and 80 or 90 wrestlers of the Raja interrupted the meeting and beat the kisans. Mussamat Samraj Devi, the wife of a kisan leader, was also beaten. The role of the DCC was ambivalent, as Mukherji pointed out, because even the *updeshak* Pati Lal and Baldeo Prasad Pandey of the Padrauna TCC were aiding the zamindar and the TCC were on the side of the assailants. Pati Lal and Baldeo Pandey of the Padrauna TCC are reported to have said "beat the destroyers of the zamindar".[140] Rahunath Prasad Rai, a *karta*, was attacked by 25–30 men *pahalwans*. Several of these men were armed policemen, and they took his she-buffaloes and a buffalo given on *batai* by an Ahir and half his share

[138]PAI, 1935, p. 336.
[139]PAI, 1928, p. 120.
[140]*Ibid.*

of milk. If he put the complaints down in writing they threatened a river of blood would flow, and Mukherji would be murdered. By acts of violence, the zamindars and the administration sought to crush the kisan movements.

It is interesting to note that compared to the wholehearted support, the kisans gave to issues relating to land, few kisans in this region participated in the Salt Satyagraha launched by Gandhi in March-April 1930. The Congress propaganda was fairly intensive at the local level.[141] However, the kisans were preoccupied by matters dealing with land rights, illustrating how they acted with discernment and selected issues that dealt with their immediate interests. It would not be simplistic to state that the kisans interpreted these movements by the Congress primarily as No-Rent campaigns against oppression expressing a distinct class identity. Although these movements among the kisans were often independent of the Congress, to the administration, it was one and the same thing.

There is a worrying tendency even in modern Indian historiography, frequently, to seek to correlate patterns in political developments at the All-India and provincial levels, with those in village-level politics, although such links remain tenuous. They also fail to to uncover or recognise the autonomous dimensions or historical weight of popular politics. It is clear that the nature of political participation in the urban and sometimes semi-urban contexts was different from the rural context, particularly with regard to the land problem. It is also not surprising that the issues propagated by the Congress such as the salt *satyagraha*, *khadi* and so forth had a "lukewarm reception" in the villages.[142] This was precisely how the Congress represented different meanings to different sections of the population. The kisans participated in politics because they wanted redress

[141] Appendix I.
[142] Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.

against *julum*. They often crossed the boundaries of what the UPPCC defined as "correct behaviour" and they were not always acquainted with, or, interested in official Congress charters or guidelines.

By the 1930s, the Congress was forced to recognise these distinctions and change its attitude: although the Non-Cooperation Movement and Gandhi were responsible for eventuating kisan participation, popular politics had impressed its claim on Congress polity. The Civil Disobedience Movement marked a distinct shift and the Congress focused its attention on the countryside,in particular, on the widespread agrarian distress; until the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1930, the UPPCC was forced to consider a No-Rent campaign in the countryside.

An official vendetta was launched against the movement and the timing could not have been worse. The depression of the 1930s was probably the most serious economic calamity to trigger widespread agrarian unrest: not only was there a fall in prices of food grains and increase in rents, but it had been preceded by a a series of bad seasons and crop failures; for instance, the floods of 1929 affected twenty-nine districts in U.P.[143] Further, the movements of rents between 1893–94 and 1929–30 had officially recorded an increase of 63% and in Gorakhpur division rents had increased by 43%. These were the official estimates, the reality was far worse. Such adverse circumstances made payments of rents virtually impossible as these were very hard times for the kisans. One official estimate by D.C. Knox, a revenue official records the fall in price of produce in Hathras in Gorakhpur: the market price of wheat fell from Rs 5 per *maund* in January–March 1930 to 2–8 by December.[144] In general, there was a 50% drop in the price of staple food

[143]UPPCC, Agrarian Distress in the United Provinces (henceforth ADR), September 1931 (Delhi, 1982), Introduction.
[144]*Ibid.*

grains. Further, kisans continued to be distressed by oppressive practices such as *nazarana, bhusa, hari, begar* and illegal levies. They were not given any receipts for the rents realised. Their lands were taken away from them while others faced imprisonment for a year or more on charges of arrears in rent.

Meanwhile, as always, Gandhi insisted on "harmony, goodwill and co-operation among all classes" and, typically, proposed trusteeship.[145] The government behave like Caliph Omar and King Janaka and cease to be "mere rent collectors" and instead become "trustees and trusted friends of the tenants and trust Congressmen", while the kisans pay their legal rent. Occupancy tenants were to pay eight annas and non-occupancy tenants twelve annas. But no one was listening.

The U.P. provincial government framed a budget which demanded not only complete collection of revenue from the landlords, and rents from the tenants, but also insisted that all outstanding arrears were to be collected by the zamindars. It openly offered to combine with the zamindars to collect rent by force. It issued a statement to the effect that, "If the revenue staff need police protection in execution of the legal processes it shall be given and you can utilise this opportunity and the presence of the revenue staff and the police in the villages to push on your collection".[146] The repressive arm of the law was strengthened; despite the slump of 1931, the only official salaries not to suffer a cut were police salaries.[147] Further all remission slips by the kisans were to be referred to the Aman Sabha.

The colonial administration was also reported to have served notices to the zamindars for delayed payment of revenue. Several reports of requests by zamindars asking for two months' grace for payment of revenue on the grounds that

[145] *Ibid.*, Appendix XIV, pp. 230–2.
[146] *Ibid.* p. 56.
[147] D. A. Low, "Introduction: The climateric years" in D.A Low, (ed.), Congress and the Raj, p. 4.

kisans were witholding rents were in evidence.[148] The officials warned that it was "the agrarian rather than the political situation that needed watching".[149]

It was clear that from the 1930s, the authorities felt threatened by the continuing politicisation among the kisans, which they attributed to the Congress, and they sought to crush its influence. Local *netas* were branded as "dictators": to the government they were leaders who had no popular support. The police files reported a marked increase in violence and crimes against property: "subversive activities took a turn for the worse particularly in the trans-Rapti region".[150] Atrocities were committed against political activists and their associates who were charged with sedition, under section 107 CPC for holding Congress meetings, planting Congress flags, enroling Congress volunteers, formation of panchayats in the villages and the opening of Congress offices.[151] They arrested many kisan *netas* and *kartas* on the following charges:

> Tumhare gaon mein Congress ka daftar kaim hai aur tum ghum kar jabran volunteer bharti karte ho.[152]
>
> Tum mauziyat mein ghum khar kashtakaron ko volunteer banne ki tarkhib dete ho. Logon ko lagan ada karna se mumaniyat karte ho.
>
> Tum Congress main volunteer zabardast bharti karte ho aur jo inkar karte hain uska huqqa band karte ho.[153]

[148]Interview with Gorakh Babu, Bansi estate, Bansi, 27 January 1992.
[149]U.P. Home fortnightly reports, File 18/5/37 NAI.
[150]U.P. Home fortnightly reports, File 18/2/1938 NAI.
[151]ADR, p. 50.
[152]*Ibid.*, p. 51.
[153]*Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.

("In your village there is a Congress office and you wander about and forcibly enroll volunteers.")

("You wander about the *mauza* and illegally proposition the kisans to become volunteers and propagate the non-payment of rent.")

("You forcibly enroll volunteers in the Congress and practise social boycott on those who refuse.")

Such officially worded undertakings were given to kisans who could barely understand Hindi or Urdu, let alone read it, and they were asked to make them with their thumb prints. This was one of the methods used to dissuade them from taking part in politics;

> Hum log Congress mein kam karte thhey. Ab hum Congress mein kam na karenge. Muafi chhahate hain. Hum sailan maaf farmaiye jawe aur daftar Congress se apna naam katwa lengey aur tarikh imroza se koi kam Congress committee ka wa Kisan sabha waghaira na qaim karenge aur minjanib Congress ke kissi tahrik mein shirkat na karenge. Guzashta waqayat se sarkar maf farmawey. Jo karrowai dafa 107 ki ho rahi hai us sey bari farmai jawen.[154]

("We used to work in the Congress. From now on we will not work in the Congress. We want to be forgiven. We promise to remove our names from the Congress office andwill not do any work for the Congress committee or the Kisan Sabha etc and will not participate in any future Congress gathering. We humbly beg the government to forgive us and hope that section 107 CPC will not be imposed upon us.")

[154] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

There were many stories of the use of physical torture against the kisans and these had an important bearing on the expression of political consciousness. The administration denied any knowledge of the repression. For instance, in 1930 Malcolm Hailey, responding to complaints against the police and the zamindars, noted that no hospital case had been reported to him.[155]

A few examples have been selected to illustrate the nature of widespread police brutality which created a "reign of terror". Kisans were beaten with canes, *lathis*, rods and even the chains that were used to tie up the elephants. They received many lashings varying from fifty to seventy cuts, until they were senseless and practically dead. A popular punishment was to make a *"murgah"* (a trussed chicken) of a kisan by tying him upside down, beating him senseless and making him stand in the hot sun. The kisans' families were not spared either; brothers were punished for not preventing a member of the family from becoming a volunteer; wives and sisters of Congress men and kisans were dragged outside the house, stripped of their ragged clothes, beaten with shoes and sticks were stuck into their vaginas. Women and men were made to do the "frog dance" and roll on the ground in full view of the entire village.[156] Young women were the chief targets and gang rape was common. In some instances even pregnant women were not spared. Often where political activity was particularly noticeable, whole villages were set on fire and the cows and bulls of the kisans were attached to the court even before the judgement.

To cite a few examples from Gorakhpur and Basti districts in during 1931:[157]

Firstly, the Siswa bazaar incident: Khesaradi village was near the bazaar and

[155]Cell, Malcolm Hailey, p. 159.
[156]Interview with Vijaypal Chamar, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 11 February 1992.
[157]ADR, 1931, Appendices VIII and IX, pp. 190–97.

Nawal Kishore Singh and Param Hans Singh, were two zamindars who had received a representation from the kisan panchayat stating that they were prepared to pay the legal rent which was 2 to 2/8 of a bigha and not the prevailing demand of 4/8 to 4/12 bigha and they would not pay *kolhuawan*. The zamindars sent 150 *lathaits* (men with bamboo staves) to loot the village and all items belonging to the kisans were removed. Utterly crushed, the kisans gave in to the zamindars, who made them sign promissary notes of Rs 500. Rajbali the *sarpanch*, Bimal, Chaukar and Naboo Lunia, were the kisan leaders who were held them in confinement after torturing them. The DCC intervened and estimated the loss to be Rs 4,000 and made the zamindars cancel the promissary notes.

Secondly, the Nauna incident: The zamindar, Udai Narain Singh ordered the burning of the house of a Congress volunteer Jhinnu Tewari. His fields were ploughed up by the zamindar's men. Mahesh Chamar, another *karta* said although he had completed sowing his fields the zamindar's men had ploughed it. Motai Ahir, another *karta*, said that he was made to kneel down and *matas* (a vicious variety of red ants), were put over his body A large number of people were beaten by the *lathaits*.

Thirdly, the Basantpur incident: The zamindar Ali Baksh Khan demanded *ikhfah* and demanded ten times the legal rent. 25 out of the 82 huts were burned when the *karindas* set the village on fire. Two of the zamindars' men were caught redhanded but they were released by the court for "want of sufficient proof".

In contrast, the police charged a number of kisans "for rioting" when they demonstrated against the murder of Ganga, a respected kisan activist of Rajaura; post-mortem reports had revealed three bullet wounds. Here the zamindars Chunni Lal and Ram Narain Lal attacked the village which had taken an

important part in Congress work. The kisans agreed to pay whatever they could by 10 June on being persuaded by Babu Raghav Das. On 7 June, they took grain to the bazaar to sell but the carts were taken to the police headquarters which was in the zamindars' *chhavani* (seating place) and confiscated. Ganga, the local kisan *neta*, was locked up by the zamindars' *goondas* (in collusion with the police), tortured and killed.

One kisan leader recalls the kisans' "spirit of listless renunciation" which was conveyed by the following poem:

> Dukhiya kisan ham hai, Bharat ke rehene wale, be dam hai na dam hai, be mauth marne wale,
>
> insan ban ke aye, go pak uus zamin par, Hamse accha hai ye accha, ghas charne wale.[158]

("We are the sad kisans, residents of India, without any strength at all and no strength to fall back on, and dead even before we are dead. We were born as humans, but the cows are better off than us, grazing and eating grass.")

This song was composed in 1931 in Tulsipura, Basti, when a kisan *karta* had been tortured and the publicity it generated led to the visit of important leaders such as Nehru, Manraj Yadav and Vishambhar Dayal Tripathi. Balabadrinath gave Nehru a petition against the *julum* perpetrated by the Raja of Changera. Nehru handed it to his deputy, Nangnarayan, who put it aside. The UPPCC rarely handled local grievances and often the MCC leaders had to sort it out on their own.

[158]Personal communication from Balbadrinath.

The "sacredness" of the Congress

As has already been indicated there was not one Congress but many versions of it. Despite the multitude of meanings and conflicts that caused rifts within the movement, it commanded a sacred status; it could not be subject to ordinary criticsm. Many *netas* whom I met said that from the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, it was regarded like a peepal tree (which cannot be cut down), and having a spokesman like Gandhi only added to its allure.

Pandey notes that it had gradually developed a three-tier infrastructure, various levels of office that resembled a party, leading to ideological antagonisms and rival claims for authority.[159], The identity of the Congress was transformed by the growing discord, particularly between the left wing and the right battling for political power and allegiance. There was a yawning divide between the formal doctrine of the Congress party and the demand for a kisan Congress. In addition to the kisan question, there were other political events which led to this rift, such as Bhagat Singh's execution in March 1931. Many *netas* agreed that it had a profound impact on them: "His sacrifice had an electrifying effect, and very soon his name was revered in every village in the U.P. and India".[160] It propelled many young village boys (as well as urban youths) towards revolutionary socialism. A few kisan *netas* such as Pabbar Ram, Prakash Chandra Pandey, Ramanand Gupta, Jharkande Rai and Jai Bahadur Singh were secret members of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India (henceforth RSPI, an underground left-wing organisation), whilst also being members of the Congress. The RSPI organisation was particularly strong in Azamgarh.

[159]Pandey, The Ascendancy, Chapter III.
[160]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.

These developments affected the political attitudes of the UPPCC Anyone with a radical bent of mind displaying a disposition towards a worker-peasant raj was not encouraged by the the right wing in the UPPCC. For instance, Gauri Shankar Mishra was dismissed from the UPPCC in March 1929 because he proposed the following: a separate constitution and programme of the Indian peasants league which aimed to educate and politically uplift them, a central organisation which was to consist of an all India peasants council, a cabinet, provincial, district, *tahsil* and village kisan sabha with a peasant representative from every district in India, and 80 men who were to be co-opted by the provincial kisan sabha. The aim was to secure an interest for the kisans in landholding; he also demanded the abolition of *begar* and other unjust levies and urged the organisation of peasant banks, cottage industries, seed stores, schools, libraries, free and compulsory education, better health and village dispensaries, and encouraging games and other amusements.[161]

The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 was a rejoinder by the left-wing to counter such disciplinary measures by the Congress. Acharya Narendra Dev and Sampurnanand were to emerge as important leaders in advocating the cause of socialism. Although the brand of socialism advocated by Narendra Dev was less militant than that of Swami Sahajanand, these differences in ideology did not affect kisan politics in eastern U.P. until the 1940s.

The radicalism of the left was regarded as politically expedient by the Congress; it was quick to seize opportunities and jump the band wagon. It also learnt from its mistakes: if there was to be a kisan sabha it would be a Congress-led kisan sabha. Research was undertaken on the kisan question. Lal Bahadur Sastri com-

[161]PAI, 1929, p. 318.

mented on the agrarian situation saying that the main problem was caused by the old, rotten, pressing rent". To understand the agrarian situation, all kinds of questions needed to be asked, such as size of the land-holding, nature of the holding, its fertility and cropping patterns, the availiability of seed and manure and irrigation. He emphasised that all these questions had to be asked from the view-point of the kisans, not the administration. The government had to relieve the kisans' indebtedness and establish what the kisans' debts were.[162]

The UPPCC was represented at the district, *tahsil, mandal* and village level. In Basti, the DCC set up five *tahsil* committees in 1929 and put a few *netas* in charge of each office.[163] In Harraiya, Moti Singh, in Bansi Har Narain Lal, in Dummariaganj Har Nai, in Basti Udai Shankar Dubey and in Khalilabad, Mahabir Prasad were put in charge of *tahsil* committees. These DCCs were divided on the kisan question; some of the members owned land and could be described as petty zamindars. For instance, Ram Shankar Lal wrote to Rajendra Prasad in 1936 that there were fewer workers on the Congress rolls but the kisans representation was 75%. Of the total he desired a reduction in membership fees, one anna instead of four annas. He warned that "it was not judicious to fix a worker—peasant percentage" in the DCC; in view of the local conditions it would be advantageous for achieving a closer association between the worker-peasant on the one hand, and the Congress on the other, but everyone should enroll as direct members of the Congress. Giving "special representation on a class basis would lead to class antagonism in the august national organisation".[164]

In other *tahsils* there were strong kisan leaders such as Shibbanlal Saxena

[162] *Aaj*, 1 April 1936.
[163] Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal
[164] Rajendra Prasad papers, File IX/ 36, Collection II, letter from Ram Shankar Lal to Rajendra Prasad, 28 June 1936.

in Maharajganj (Gorakhpur) and the Congress was what they made of it. To counter the conservatism of the DCC Shibbanlal resigned from the Congress kisan sabha, and formed a separate kisan sabha which was independent of the Congress. It was his ambition to form a kisan sabha in every village.[165] All the kisans' troubles were blamed by the kisan leader on capitalism whose benefactors were the zamindars who perpetrated *julum*. The *netas* sought to explain the meaning of capitalism to the kisans with references to the Russian Revolution and end of Tsardom.

Despite political differences, both the left-wing and the right worked towards enlisting members in the Congress, and many printed leaflets were distributed. There were two kinds of volunteers in the 1930s in the Congress. The first kind took the pledge and joined the Hindusthani Seva Dal, while the others did not. The pledge ran thus:

> "I agree with the Indian National Congress and the attainment of complete independence and promise to the best of my ability, unity, fraternity among all castes and religious communities in India. I promise to promote indigenous goods and I would be ready to go to jail if the occasion arises, and prepare to suffer assault, and even lay down life and will not demand maintenance from my family if I am sent to jail".[166]

Another political development that strengthened the left wing in the Congress was the growth of revolutionary socialism. This was particularly evident in Azamgarh. Although many members of the RSPI came from here they continued to

[165]PAI, 1935, p. 266.
[166]*Ibid.*, 1930, p. 237.

remain in the Congress, and later the CSP, and work among the kisans. They were one of the first to advocate a kisan raj, and urged that all kisans be freed from debts by cancelling them. They urged the forming of kisan committees that would protect them from the police, zamindar and patwaris. They preached armed action by the kisans for self-defence and set up training camps. Some present day Congressmen believe that it was the RSPI members who put forward the first proposal for zamindari abolition in 1936.[167] Many of their slogans were appropriated by the Congress which was thus able to appear as the most the most able party.

It is important to keep in mind how the official line of the Congress called for a separate kisan organisation in every village.[168] Further, kisan sabhas had to be established and wherever the administration was against them, they had to be protected. This would have been unthinkable by the Congress in the previous year.

In addition to the kisans and their *netas*, many schoolboys were influenced by the political radicalism of the time and later participated in the kisan movements from the late 1930s onwards. One example of a schoolboy's commitment was Prakash Chandra who was a student in the local school, which was also attended by Hansraj Yadav, Kallu Dubey and Jharkhande Rai. A local society called the Nav Yuvak Sudharak Sangh was established. Students were encouraged to participate in the its meetings, which were held every weekend, to discuss political and social problems.[169] The headmaster of the school, Ram Prasad Mathur (in quest for the title of Rai Bahadur), tried to prevent his students from joining

[167]Interview with Singhasan Singh, 1 May 1992.
[168]*Aaj*, 29 October 1936.
[169]Prakash C. Pandey, Mangal Sootra (Lucknow, 1986), p. 59.

the movement and publicly humiliated and punished them. He was defied by his students who wore "Gandhi *topis*" to school and a dozen village schoolboys were later beaten with canes. They were inspired by the revolutionary terrorism of Ram Prasad Bismail and Bhagat Singh. In August 1933, Bismail's mother gave a very inspiring speech in the market called Urdu bazaar and said other mothers must give birth to such sons who would be willing to sacrifice their lives for the country.[170]

Another issue that caused serious political turmoil in the 1930s was generated by the sugarcane crisis. The plight of the cane growers added an important dimension to popular politics in eastern U.P. In Basti, Khalilabad, Munderwa and Walterganj sugar mills made enormous profits. Sugar mills in the other districts also recorded high profits. In 1933–34, 27.8% of the total output of sugar-cane was owned by these mills.[171] However, the price paid for cane remained the same and fell during the depression; further, the mills continued to underweigh the cane. There were demonstrations against millowners. It was generally advocated that sugar-cane should not be sold to the factories unless the price of cane was increased. They were asked to crush cane at home and use *kolhus*. To assist the kisans *Ikh sanghs* were formed in the villages. For instance, in Basti, an *Ikh sangh* was formed and a membership fee of one anna was charged, but very poor kisans were exempted from paying.[172] Prominent local Congressmen organised the *Ikh sangh*. Ram Dhari Pandey, Bishwanath Mukherji and Shibbanlal Saxena addressed many meetings. Sometimes the crowd of kisans was so large that the leaders had to stand on elephants to address these meetings. There was tremen-

[170] *Ibid.* p. 51.
[171] Shahid Amin, Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Enquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India (Delhi, 1984), p. 209.
[172] PAI, 1936, p. 713.

dous enthusiasm and this strengthened the movements against *julum*.[173] The consequence of the cane crisis in terms of popular politics was two-fold: firstly, it brought more sections of rural society into agitational politics; secondly, this development also led to merging of the *Ikh sanghs* into the agitations organised by the kisan sabhas.[174]

In addition to political work, the DCC worked on issues dealing with social reform and social work inspired by Gandhi's Harijan work. For instance, in Azamgarh, a Seva Dal was formed by Swami Satyanand (Baldev Chauube), and village upliftment meetings were held in Madhuban in 1933. He spoke against untouchability and stated that instead of saying *"Choo oh math"* (Do not touch) they should say *"Daro math"* (Do not fear). An ashram was set up in Dohrighat. Women's uplift was sought through widow remarriage and 5,600 widows were remarried on 5 June 1936 in Gorakhpur.[175] Temples were opened for the lower-castes in Pipri and Amila.[176] The influence of the Arya Samaj was evident in all kinds of activities dealt with by the various banches of the Congress such as the Quami Seva Dal; the communal line was inevitably invoked because along with *Charkha, Sangathan, Swadeshi*, there was also the cry for *Shuddhi* and cow protection. During these years, the kisans did not pay serious attention to any of these teachings except *sangathan* (unity) and were happy to receive cloth, food and seed supplies. The DCC also organised panchayats, and along with political propaganda, many Congressmen worked on social reform and social work. For instance cloth were distributed by the UPPCC in 1934,[177] and the organisation

[173]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Banaras, 8 January 1992.
[174]Interview with Thakur Singhasan Singh, Gorakhpur, 19 March 1992.
[175]*Aaj*, 6 June 1936.
[176]PAI, 1936, p. 585.
[177]*Aaj*, 12 December 1934.

of cottage industries was planned in 1935.[178]

The government started a co-operative movement in 1936, and also succeeded in dissuading the Gita press from helping the Congress.[179] The Aman Sabha was given further powers and took charge of tempting the kisans with free provisions of rations such as kerosene oil, clothes and seed. Further, the government assisted the landlords to form a political party to counteract the power of the Congress. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir Malcolm Hailey personally supervised the formation of the National Agriculturist Party (one for Agra and another for Awadh) to counter the influence of the Congress.[180] Further, the zamindars allocated considerable sums of money to thwart Congress propaganda For instance, the Raja of Tamokhi sanctioned Rs 48,000 for the elections in February 1937 and the kisans were warned that the Congress would not help them.[181]

"Victory to the Congress"

But none of these measures diminished the popularity of the Congress. In Basti alone there were 34 mandals in 1933 which increased to 53 by 1936.[182] Following the electoral agreement, the Muslim League and the Congress decided to contest the assembly elections in 1936. Some months before the formation of the Congress ministry in 1937, Congressmen undertook extensive propaganda among the kisans distributing pamphlets and participating in fairs and festivals. The promise of radical agrarian reform drew large crowds of villagers. The average size of these

[178] *Aaj*, 14 January 1935.
[179] AICC, File P-20, 1937, NMML.
[180] Peter Reeves, "Landlords and party politics in the United Provinces 1934–7", in D.A. Low (ed.),Soundings in Modern South Asian History (London, 1977), pp. 264–265.
[181] PAI, 13 June 1936, p. 418.
[182] Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.

meetings was anything from 50 to 10,000 during these years: it was a pointer of things to come.

> Kasht kaun mitha sakta hai? kasht Kangress wala hi mitha sakta hai
>
> Kangress wala ko vote do'[183]

("Who can wipe out your troubles? Your troubles can only be solved by the Congress. Vote for the Congress.")

Crucial to the understanding of popular politics was the use of "the Congress swagger", particularly in relation to the local officials such as the police, *patwaris, chowkidar* and the *daroga*.[184] The kisans were made to believe that a new social order was in the making, and it would revolutionise the character of rural society. On their part, local leaders encouraged the display of defiance by the kisans. For instance, on 31 August 1937, a Congress worker gathered a crowd of 200 Ahirs and others who drove their cattle into the sugar factory estate owned by the Raja of Padrauna; they allowed their cattle to wander about and graze freely destroying some 10,000 acres of crops in the estate. The estate workers who tried to prevent this were made to sit down and ordered to submit their resignations.[185] The abuse of officials was encouraged and in some instances the local Congress *netas* took action against corrupt officials; for instance in one village a *qurq amin* was dismissed in 1936.[186] Further, the kisans were lured by the promise of action against the zamindar and the police. The kisans were told that they should not be intimidated by the police into paying their rents. Their main troubles were on account of indebtedness and efforts would be made to get their debts cancelled.

[183]This was a popular slogan and was recited by many informants.
[184]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.
[185]PAI, 1937, p. 266.
[186]*Ibid.*, p. 79.

Police weekly reports record that 1,959 meetings were held between 11 April 1936 to January 1937.[187] In Gorakhpur, the district kisan conference organised a procession of 500 kisans, which included 200 peasant women protesting against the servants of the the zamindar' candidates, Babu Purushottam Das and Rai Saheb Madhusudan Das of Maharajganj and Sadr *tahsils*. They had beaten a volunteer for distributing notices of a meeting from his house, and in the second case they had ejected a kisan from his land for cavassing votes for the Harijan candidate, Puranmasi Chamar. The procession consisted of three bullock carts with a victim in each of the first two carts, and another kisan who had been ill-treated in the third cart. It started from Laldighi and went through the main thoroughfares of the town and were warmly cheered by the onlookers.[188] Elsewhere in Basti, many meetings were held. On 21 March, at a meeting of 200 in Majwara village Jagat, Kotwali, Ram Shankar advised the kisans to unite and enlist others to become members so that they might be able to establish Congress committees in villages in order to set up home rule as in Russia, Japan and Germany.[189] They would then be able "to kick out white complexioned people ... No one should be afraid of red turbans as the SP and Magistrate had been transferred to the Congress and could be dismissed by them." Another speaker said that S.C. Bose had been released because the government was afraid and might possibly apologise to Mahatma Gandhi and give complete *swaraj*. Ram Daman also advised the audience not to be afraid of red turbans as the Congress had the power of dismissal. He added "the DM [District Magistrate] and the SP [Superintendant of Police] would soon be cleaning the shoes of Gandhi-capped

[187]My informants say that these were only the CID reported meetings. The actual figures during the election year was closer to 5,000 in these three districts.
[188]Interview with Jagdish Pathak, Gorakhpur, 9 April 1992.
[189]PAI, 1938, pp. 167, 236.

persons and would bow to them". In the speeches they ridiculed the note-taking plainclothes CID man or chowkidar; they said no-one in the crowd should sign these notes as witnesses.[190]

The Congress blamed the administration for all the ills which the local leaders argued would disappear with *kisan raj*. There was so much political excitement that many kisans believed that the new world was already here. For instance, Sukhraj Pasi and Bikari Chamar announced by drum beat that cases should be sent to the Congress office and not given to the police or the court. Official records note in September 1937 that the prestige of the police had been destroyed by the considerable interference in their work in Azamgarh and Gorakhpur. They further noted a Congress *mandal* proclamation that if any policeman or *chowkidar* was seen "on the beat" unaccompanied by a Congress worker, he should be arrested and brought to the Congress office.[191] In one case, the report continues, a constable watching the movement of a "criminal suspect" was accosted by a Congress volunteer and threatened with dire action. The police were also warned: The Superintendant of Police of Gorakhpur had received a large number of applications typed in English with thumb impressions of villagers against certain police officers.[192] There was a confidence on the part of both the *netas* and the kisans not just to challenge but actually to overthrow authority—even the most pernicious kind.

A major change in the political climate was the shift to militant socialism. All the kisan *netas* speak of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati with reverence. His visits to the districts were always like a "cyclonic journey" *toofan yatra* to the

[190] *Ibid.*, p. 236.
[191] *Ibid.*, 1937, p. 566.
[192] *Ibid.*, July 1937, p. 57.

administration, and kisans were mesmerised by him.[193] He commanded their reverence by his sadhu image and was able to attack their religious and social beliefs without the risk of condemnation. His main goal was to persuade them to accept Marxism. For instance, he said that although he had left his home in search of God, thirty years ago he had failed to find God.[194] However, during that time he had come into contact with the kisans and was deeply stirred by their acute poverty. He warned that neither the Congress, nor God or Gandhi would save them: they must learn to stand up on their feet and be ready to die for self-respect and the honour of their women. After all, he argued, *roti* (bread) was the root of all wordly things. It was more important than God because only after eating could one turn one's thoughts to the divine with any sense of gratification. So neither offerings to god nor bathing in the Ganga was any good. Further he warned that 90% of the Congress consisted of a great number of people who thought in different ways and the kisans had to think on their own instead of shifting the burden on to Nehru or Gandhi.

Visahmbhar Dayal Tripathi was another popular leader who advocated the establishment of a socialist state.[195] He noted that the condition of the kisans in Awadh was far worse than of kisans anywhere else in the world. The only solution was to adopt the socialist doctrine. He urged the kisans to join the Congress if they wished to improve their lot. They would then seek solutions to arrears of rent, exclusion of uneconomic holdings, repeal of ejectment, discontinuation of *hari* and *begar* through the formation of kisan sabhas. After all, the Congress was for the kisans. Thousands of kisans gathered and took out processions in

[193]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.
[194]PAI, 1937, p. 441.
[195]*Ibid.* January 1935, p. 57.

nearly all the *tahsils* of Gorakhpur. Elsewhere they gathered and demanded revocation of *hari, begar* and other levies. For instance, at Darghat, Hata, Kasia, Maharajganj, Bapardah, Basantpur and other places kisan sabhas were held.[196] The kisans were promised that if they voted for the Congress "a golden age was in sight". Mockery of the authorities was blended in with popular images of exploitation, for instance:

> One day there will be a revolution, a socialist government: you should believe that India will obtain independence. The ship is ready, you should get ready at once; give a forceful order to the white people. All Englishmen will join and say, "let us now think of some plan so that we may remain in India, let us pray to the Indian in such a way that we may not go". Now what is their prayer? Please listen: "After leaving India what shall we eat in England? There is nothing there, we will die of starvation; we will give up eating biscuits, drinking brandy and tea and we will take sour milk, gram and *mahua*, we will stop working as *tahsildars* and work as servants of the zamindars we will, be employed in collecting fuel ... and will clean latrines".[197]

Many acts of self denial and heroism was demonstrated by kisans in the hope of a Congress victory. There were also a few acts of violence: On 28 November 1936, it was reported that an important zamindar Pande, of Nerharia village, Kotwali, was murdered by a tenant in broad daylight. The zamindar was reputed to have been a hard taskmaster and involved the kisans in considerable litigation.[198]

[196]AICC papers, note found in File P-20, 1937, NMML.
[197]PAI, June 1937, p. 440, sung by Chandra Gupt Bal.
[198]*Ibid.*1936, p. 940.

Sometimes the force of political agitation of the kisans depended on the level of organsation at the village level. For instance, the zamindars and kisans in Khalilabad had a "big confrontation" in the villages of Saikari and Besava. In anticipation of kisan raj, many kisans marched with tricolour flags and a *bigul* player shouted, "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" and "Zamindar murdabad". They set fire to a zamindar's house in Saikari then attacked and wounded a few other zamindars.[199] It did not matter whether the victim was a big or small zamindar; to the poor kisans they belonged to a single breed, and the very mention of the word aroused their ire and contempt.[200]

But these were stray acts of violence—the kisans were usually on the receiving end. They were encouraged not to give up their fields and were prepared to sacrifice their lives for the fields between 1936–37.[201] A few widely publicised stories can be given of kisans who braved death to live up to these ideals. Badal Luniya, a kisan of Gulriha village was cultivating his land when he was accosted by the *lathials* of the zamindar Chauube who wanted to occupy the field. But Badal continued to plough it silently and was murdered in cold blood.

Another often repeated tale was that of Puranmasi Chamar of Sevatri village, who was a *harwaha* (ploughman) to the Shankar zamindar. His *karinda* (bailiff) Lakshmi Pathak with a group of *goondas* raped his wife on 27 January 1937 whilst he was away at an election meeting. She was eight months pregnant and died on account of the ordeal. The zamindar threatened that anyone found working for the Congress would meet a similar fate to Puranmasi Chamar's wife. Saxena wrote to Gandhi, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Nehru, Pant, the Governor and the

[199] *Aaj*, 16 April 1936.
[200] Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.
[201] Election pamphlet of Shibbanlal Saxena, 1980.

Viceroy. He visited the village with a hundred kartas; but the fear of the zamindar prevented any of the kisans from coming forward. The kartas once more had to work with the kisans and instil confidence in them. 27 January 1937 was mourned on account of her martyrdom. A sabha was held and Baba Raghav Das addressed it. The kisans narrated all their tales of woe. Bansi Chamar's wife said she had been also been ill-treated by the *karinda*. There was a great anger among the kisans. The government passed orders under section 144 CPC to prevent any reference from being made to Puranmasi Chamar's wife.[202] The administration favoured the authority of the zamindars. The zamindars intensified the oppression and attacked Puranmasi Chamar and his little daughter. The Collector was forced to arrest the *karinda* and his associates.

Such acts of oppression intensified as the zamindars felt seriously threatened by the popularity of the Congress network in the villages. It is important to note further, that caste and religion were not issues that were central to popular politics; most of the kisan *kartas* and local *netas* were from the lower-castes. Some of these kisans who belonged to the lower-castes such as Puranmasi Chamar, Harnath Prasad Chamar, Gajadhar Prasad Chamar did contest the elections in Gorakhpur, Basti and Azamgarh and won by large majorities in 1937.

Meanwhile, the National Agriculturist Party tried to consolidate the zamindars' position and many concessions were offered to the kisans in individual zamindaris. But Lakshmi Narain Pandey recalled that the kisans in these areas did not rise to the bait: "puri halwa rajwa ka aur vote surajwa ka" ("they ate the puri and sweets of the government, but voted for the Congress").[203] Prakash Chandra also noticed that during the elections of 1937, the kisans ate the sweets

[202]PAI, 1937, p. 149.
[203]Interview with Lakshmi Narain Pandey, Anandnagar, 22 April 1992.

of "Danadhaya Raja but cast their votes in the name of Gandhi Maharaja".[204] To them, Gandhi was the very incarnation of God, so victory for the Congress was assured. Further, the power to vote was regarded as sacred. Many villagers observed a fast on the day of polling and broke it after exercising their vote, and many kisans bowed before the boxes of Congress candidates as a mark of respect before voting.[205]

Although the alignments within the Congress were gradually to come apart in the coming years, the patterns of activity that were established during the 1920s and 1930s made it a formidable political organisation; it had numerous volunteers in every village and there was much publicity, such as a lavish display of flags[206] The Congress Parliamentary Board allotted two cars and 20 cycles for electioneering in remote areas such as Nichlaul, Masurganj, Tarkulwa, Purandharpur and Campierganj in the trans-Rapti tract.[207] The terms of reference used were familiar to the kisans and the promise of agrarian reform clinched successs for the party. Further, some important leaders went on *pad yatras* (walking tours) such as Raghava Das, who explained the Congress programme and the significance of the elections to the kisans.[208] Congress volunteers collected *muthia*, *chutki* and *karkhani* and persuaded many kisans to enrol as volunteers.

In conclusion, the elections of 1937 gave a fresh impetus to the movements organised by the kisan sabhas. These agitations in rural areas from the 1920s demanded a solution to the land problem. They were largely independent of the official Congress organisation in U.P. and the DCC. The local office of the

[204]Pandey, Mangal Sootra, p. 116.
[205]Low, "Introduction", p. 30.
[206]U.P. Home Fortnightly Reports, File 18-2-1937, NAI.
[207]PAI, 1936, p. 891.
[208]AICC, File G-23, 1936, NMML.

Congress tended to be critical of kisan and working-class radicalism and supported conservative patterns of political activities such as non-cooperation with government, picketing of shops, burning of foreign cloth and so on. Meanwhile, the kisan movements developed a distinct political style of their own. For the first time they were able to chalk out their demands and stake their claims: the abolition of *hari, begar*, other illegal levies, security of land rights and the end of oppression by the police, *patwaris, chowkidars, karindas*, and other instruments of zamindari *julum*. The movements made the kisans' experience a sense of empowerment and optimism. Further, they assisted in dramatically transforming their social, cultural and political life. The kisans were prepared to re-negotiate their own landscape under Congress raj.

Chapter 4

Holding out: The resistance to julum 1937–1947

This chapter examines popular movements against zamindari *julum* during the period 1937 to 1947. It seeks to show how it was possible for radical popular protest to break into the *élite* world of political decision-making and how these movements influenced the contemporary political climate. It shows that although the Congress "high command" was critical of kisan radicalism and repeatedly sought to constrain it, it was unable to prevent the emergence of a powerful and autonomous political identity among the kisans. The revolutionary spirit and social content of the movements against *julum* continued even after Independence, a testimony to the autonomy, zeal and determination of subaltern protest.

From the kisans' viewpoint, the prospect of tenancy reform justified the victory of the Congress party in 1937. They believed that the new government would transform the social order, in relation to land ownership, not at the margins but at its very centre. In the villages, the local *netas* and *kartas* firmly placed the kisans' demand for land ownership and the abolition of illegal levies on the immediate agenda: this was the need of the hour. These developments generated new agencies and structures of power that had popular support. By paying attention to "the voices of the kisans", the *netas* seriously attempted to convey their ideas and beliefs and to achieve legal and political redress. The kisans also believed

that the time had come for expressing their political choice. A significant proportion among them were prepared to learn, to describe, to understand, to educate and to influence the politics through collective action and folk wisdom. These movements against zamindari *julum* dramatised the kisans' acts of perception and response by their pressing demands for the abolition of *hari, begar* and all *ikhfah* (illegal levies), and the acquisition of permanent ownership rights over the land.[1]

The Congress Ministry

There was great anticipation and hope from the Congress ministry in U.P. It was widely believed that the party would live up to its promise of tenancy legislation which the kisans interpreted to mean complete relief from debt, payment of rent and insecurity of tenure. They had every reason to believe that this would be achieved. From the mid-1930s onwards, they were aware that a growing body of information was being collected on the land problem by local *netas* with the specific intention of redressing their fears and insecurities. Serious research, they believed, was being undertaken on these issues in order to grant the kisans their rights.[2] Further, many of the kisan movements in the trans-Rapti had originated partly because of false entries in the *patwari* papers, particularly in the case of *sir* and *khudkasht* land. As it was, there was a profound distrust of the existing land records. It was, in their view, incumbent on the Congress ministry to arrange for an independent and fresh enquiry. The UPPCC office was already flooded with statistics and details of various *tahsils* compiled by *kartas* who anticipated

[1]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.
[2]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.

radical agrarian reform favouring the kisans.

Although the impetus for reform was linked to the victory of the Congress, in reality the party provided a symbolic focus of identification, rather than a source of initiative and authority: to many, the allegiance to the Congress lay beyond the party even beyond the present ministry. The need for immediate redress was put forward by the elected kisan leaders in the Legislative Assembly. For instance, Vishambhar Dayal Tripathi MLA for Unao district supported a field-by-field survey; the nature of tenants on *sir* and *khudkasht* land and the total area held by them; the number of under-proprietors, occupancy tenants, sub-tenants and the average demand of rent and so on; the total area of *sir* and *khudkasht* land held under zamindari cultivation, the area of *sir* under which these rights have been registered and the area of *sir* acquired as a result of the Oudh Rent Ammendment Act of 1921.[3] Further questions needed answers, such as: What was the nature and number of holdings of fixed-rate tenants? What was the fixed area of rent with reference to ex-proprietory tenants, statutory tenants and sub-tenants? What was the number of holdings with the total area of each and the amount of rent? What was the quantity of surplus income? It was to be a survey that scrutinised all aspects of the land question.

A fresh look at existing figures on zamindari income and the revenue demand was part of the general enquiry to fix equitable rent. It was deemed essential to compare the cash rental demand, the grain rental demand, *sayar* and other dues, the total revenue demand, remissions in rent and the amount of rent collected. Another concern was to assess the revenue on zamindari. This meant a tabulation of the annual land revenue payments by the zamindars in Agra and Awadh paying

[3] *Aaj*, 3 January 1939.

Rs.10 or less than Rs 25, paying more than Rs 25 but less than Rs 50, paying more than Rs 50 but less than Rs 100, paying more than Rs 500 but less than Rs 1,000 and up to the revenue sums of Rs. 50,000 and Rs 100,000. It was necessary to tabulate the total amount of revenue paid under each of the heads; the names of the estate agents, the revenue free land, and the local rates and rental demands of each circle in Agra and Awadh.[4]

The kisans expected to find solutions on issues that personally affected them in the Tenancy Bill, which they awaited with great eagerness. However, the delay in effecting tenancy legislation caused widespread anxiety. Contemporary observers believed that it was damaging the credibility of the party, and many *netas* rapidly became disenchanted with the Congress. By November 1937, even the British government noted that the Congress was not living up to its high promises, creating a great deal of impatience in the populace.[5] Despite the Chief Minister Govind B. Pant's attempts at pacification and promise of the immediate passage of the Bill, many kisan *netas* believed that the UPPCC leadership showed a worrying concern for the zamindars. Conversely, there were frequent complaints made by the zamindars against the kisans. The kisans were criticised for interpreting the stay orders in court as a legal sanction for not paying rents due from them.[6] Certain Congressmen, such as Shibbanlal, were criticised for misleading the kisans.

At the annual zamindari conference, resolutions were passed opposing tenancy legislation. It was decided that the elected representatives of the zamindars would

[4] *Aaj*, 3 January 1939.
[5] PAI, 1937, p. 627.
[6] Cited in the Proceedings of the United Provinces Legislative Council, 29 July 1937, volume LXIX, p. 74.

stage a walk-out when the bill came up for discussion in the assembly.[7] But the zamindars need not have worried. Mahmudullah Jung, a member of the UPLC noted that "the Congress has prevented a bloody revolution".[8] Between 1935–36, the previous government had served 19,119 warrants and 62,752 attachment cases of moveable property against the zamindars. To him, the attitude of the ministry was far more sympathetic than that of the previous government.

Respected Congressmen such as Nehru were reported to have censured kisan activism. Nehru stated that the council of the UPPCC should debate the issue of kisan participation, because in the name of Congress and its influence, many ill-advised moves were being made which were against its principles. No Congress member ought to do anything against the dictates of the UPPCC. Kisan demonstrations should take place "on rare and special occasions and should otherwise not be encouraged... whoever was assisting these meetings was doing a great injustice".[9] Gandhi had said in 1931 that zamindars were the trustees of the kisans, not their lords. He said wherever the kisan sabha activity was diverted against the Congress, the Congress could not support it.[10] He did not want to destroy the zamindars for the sake of the kisans. He said the zamindars should claim responsibility for the kisans and adopt the Congress. The kisans should join the Congress and work side by side. It was clear that once in power the Congress high command was not prepared to further, let alone fulfil, the class interests of the kisans.

The prevarications of the ministry paved the way for the phenomenal success of the Socialists and Communists in the eastern districts. On 3 May 1938, after

[7]PAI, 1939, p. 49.
[8]Cited in the Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 29 July 1937, volume LXIX, p. 99.
[9]AICC papers, P-20, Part II, May 10 1938, NMML.
[10]*Aaj*, 15 April 1938.

the Congress ministry was set up, nearly 80,000 kisans from the eastern districts formed a procession one and a half miles long and marched to Lucknow to lodge a protest against the Legislative Assembly because of the delay in taking up the zamindar issue. One member of the DCC recalled the jingles, coined by local poets and song-writers, which were recited on the way. The use of parody to sharpen their judgement was utilised, in particular by the left wing, to ridicule the Congress ministry, for instance:

"Kisan jaga, Pant bhaga".[11]

("When the kisans took up their rights, Pant had an enormous fright".)

On account of the sustained pressure from below, the Tenancy Bill of 1939 was passed.[12] It addressed several important questions which were to limit the powers of the zamindar. A ceiling of fifty acres was set on *sir* land. Anything over that in possession of the zamindar could be claimed by the kisans cultivating on the land and they were declared as hereditary tenants. Secondly, rents were fixed according to the overall cost of production and status of the tenant. Special emphasis was laid on the general conditions of agriculture in the province. Furthermore, Section 90 of the Act declared that no zamindar could take a premium for admitting a tenant to a holding, and it could not be a pre-condition for any tenant to render any service or do any work for the land-holder, whether for wages or not. Section 91 prohibited all forms of *ikhfah*, "except those sanctioned by the provincial government for bazaars and fairs".[13]

There had been stiff opposition to the act from the zamindars, and this had

[11]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.
[12]*Idem*
[13]Walter C. Neale, Economic Change in Rural India: Land Tenure and Reform in the U.P., 1800–1955 (New Haven, 1962), p. 120.

led not just to delay in effecting the legislation, but to the persistence of many loopholes in the law. The zamindars served eviction notices on any kisan who was suspected of having dealings with the Congress. Those who attended meetings were severely punished. Even before the legislation was enacted, several thousand cases of eviction and arrears of rent were filed in almost every district court under Section 171. However, the ferocity of rural agitation described in the section below had necessitated stay orders on all zamindari petitions in the lower courts. Thus the administration had been forced to bow to popular pressure.

By the late 1930s new patterns of popular protest were discernible in response to the Tenancy Bill and anticipation of Congress action. Under the ministry, the kisans resisted payment of rent and preferred to pay, if at all, to the local Congress office. Some of them braved the fear of *marpit* (severe beating) by the *lathaits* and trekked at night to the nearest local branch of the kisan sabha. It did not matter that it might have been several miles away—they had simply decided to register their complaints against the zamindars and their henchmen. To them, the *kangresiya* had proven to be "a person who believed in plain living and high thinking", someone who had been making sacrifices, someone they could trust.[14] These complaints were made either in person, or sometimes by *chittias* (notes) written on their behalf (most of them could neither read nor write) "signed" with their thumb prints. All kinds of complaints relating to zamindari *julum* were registered; the more pressing cases were selected by the local *neta* in consultation with the *kartas*, and *jathas* of kisans gathered to expedite justice.

In terms of natural calamities, these were not the best of times. In 1938–39 there were floods of considerable magnitude in the Ghagra basin which adversely

[14]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Banaras, 8 January 1992.

affected the districts of Basti, Gorakhpur, and Azamgarh. For instance, in 1939, 712 sq. kms were covered in water in Gorakhpur.[15] It was also difficult to measure the political temperature or to judge the tone of protest. Everyone and everything was subject to scrutiny, including Gandhi. In Lar, (Deoria), Swami Parmanand addressed an audience and said that the Goddess of freedom wanted the blood of the masses, as in Russia. Gandhi and Nehru were warned to work properly otherwise they would be kicked and turned out. They should go to the villages and revolutionise the masses and get rid of old ideas. The zamindars had to move with the times.[16]

The resistance to julum

The intensity of widespread organised protest at the local level marked a decisively new phase in rural politics during the 1930s and 1940s. Violence against the zamindars was openly advocated. It was a time for retribution, a time for action. One case reported on 21 May 1938, in Dharampur village, was of a zamindar, Jang Rai, who had once been a *karinda* (bailiff) and was brutally murdered by the kisans.[17] A boycott of the zamindars was urged if they troubled the kisans. Swami Sahajanand told the kisans to break the limbs of zamindars if they occupied their lands. The message was not to give up their fields at any cost and the kisans were told to sacrifice their lives if necessary.[18] In June 1938, Shibbanlal Saxena advocated "Seena dikahao, goli khaao".[19] and proposed military training for the kisans to defend themselves from *julum*. Sahajanand said that such

[15]UPRAR, 1940, p. 6.
[16]PAI, 1939, p. 123.
[17]*Ibid.*, 1938, p. 127.
[18]*Ibid.*, June 1938, p. 141.
[19]*Ibid.* "Bare your chest and eat the bullets"

training should be availiable in every *mandal*, and volunteers from every home ought to enlist in the Congress army; it was the only way they would be able to feed themselves, and face thousands of muskets and bayonets.

Another point he emphasised was class-unity, the need for united action in every village, *pargana* and *tahsil*. This was frequently repeated to counter official attempts to weaken the movements. In general, the nature of political mobilsation in the villages cut across caste and religious differences. For instance, Sahajanand preached that there were only two castes: the robbers and the poor. The kisans were neither Hindu nor Muslim but *jathas* (collectives) of poor people.[20] He stated that if a *jatha* of 50,000 kisans went inside the district, the zamindars would not dare trouble them.

Despite official Congress opposition, alternative power bases were successfully set up on behalf of the kisans. In this context, the Congress did not constitute a centrally focused structure; it was dependent on the degree of allegiance which was bestowed upon it by local *netas* and *kartas*. Both the kisans and their leaders interpreted the Congress in their own terms regarding it as a panacea for their ills, thus empowering it whilst participating in protest movements. It was a reciprocal relationship which was not acknowledged in the official sources.

From the late 1930s, the growth of self-awareness led to self-assertion on the part of the kisans.[21] Sometimes they used to send a representation to the residence of a prominent *neta* and persuade him to speak at a sabha. In nearly all these movements, the kisans and their *netas* "lived and worked in the same environment, often breathing the same air and thus politically in harmony with one

[20]Home Police File 37/187, speech 20 August 1939, UPSA.

[21]My informants stressed this point which was explained at great length by Swami Sahajanand in his autobiography, Mera Jiwan Sangharsh (Delhi, 1970), pp. 231–50

another".[22] Further, the autonomous nature of these movements, unhampered by legalism or constitutionalism, gave them considerable latitude in delegating power and authority and also the necessary bargaining power to influence the wider nature of politics; it demonstrated the organisational capacity and assertiveness of popular movements.

The heroic acts of martyrs were recounted in kisan gatherings. For example, at a kisan sabha meeting held in Gambhirpur village, Azamgarh district in 1939, a local kisan *neta*, Virendranath Verma, was reported to have told the kisans not to fear the twelve or thirteen slaves of the thana but to cut them to pieces and seize the thana.[23] They should form a line of attack: one group from the east, another from the west and so on. Bhagat Singh might be dead but there were thousands of Bhagat Singhs still alive. They intended to threaten the English as in 1857. It was not enough to end British rule but the zamindars also had to go and thus render the *daroga-mukhia* network ineffective.[24]

Thus, it was a highly charged, volatile atmosphere nurturing dissent and hope for the kisans to whom that new world had come.[25] It was not just that what they had desired was happening. They were excited by what it might also lead to, its hidden possibilities: to them things could not get any worse. The kisans were to formulate independent strategies based on their political experiences. They were not mystified by class consciousness but they gained the confidence to act through the kisan sabhas. The kisans sought retribution in various ways. It was not infrequent for several thousand kisan *jathas* to shout abusive slogans against the zamindars' men and other petty officials, such as "Haramzade haramkhor",

[22]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.
[23]PAI, 1939, p. 96.
[24]Home GAD dept, Police File 408/1885, Box no 37/187, 1939, UPSA.
[25]Interview with Ramanand Gupta, Amila, Azamgarh, 22 November 1991.

"Tumhare baaap ka sarkar hai?".[26] In fact, it was observed in January 1938, that many kisans in Gorakhpur believed that they already owned the land they ploughed.[27]

Certain important zamindars were censured in the assembly for their behaviour by the kisan leaders. For instance, Bishwanath Mukherji had been working among the kisans since the mid-1920s. He often represented their cases to important civil servants and sought to bring about a favourable settlement for them. During the late 1930s he wrote to John E. Pedley, the District Magistrate of Gorakhpur about a case in Didhai village, Kewatali. A poor kisan, Trilok Pheku was being deprived of a few *bighas* by a zamindar.[28] In other debates one member raised objections to the beating of a Chamarin, Sukhdevi Dafali, by the zamindar of Dabti Khurd and condemned the act. The Raja of Bansi also was censured for spending between Rs 80,000 and 85,000 each year on his summer holiday in Bangalore and squandering the hard-earned money of the kisans.[29] He could have built wells instead and helped during a calamity.

A boycott of higher officials in the administration was another method of protest adopted by *netas* such as Shibbanlal Saxena. He was one of the most important kisan leaders in Gorakhpur and his influence was particularly strong in Maharajganj *tahsil* and "extended all the way from Nichlaul to Nautanwa".[30] He encouraged the kisans not to pay anything but the recorded rents and not to perform any services for the zamindars or government officials, even if they paid them. High-ranking officers in the district administration such as Freddy

[26]("You of evil stock, evil doer", "Is this your father's government ?")
[27]PAI, 1938, p. 5.
[28]Letter by Bishwanath Mukherji to John Pedley, 20 February 1938, PAI April 1938, p. 3.
[29]PAI, 21 April 1939, p. 77
[30]Personal communication from Y.D. Gundevia.

Jahans, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Maharajganj, were successfully denied *hari* and *begar* by the kisans in 1937–38, which was only lifted when Gundevia was appointed as the land records officer.[31] In other cases, giving the lower rank district officials, a taste of their own medicine was not uncommon. For instance, in Azamgarh, a *chowkidar* accused Congress *kartas* on charges of obtaining his thumb impression under false pretences.

The attack on institutionalised official bribery *ghuskhori*, and corruption gained considerable momentum. The kisans were told that when *swaraj* came, every dishonest policeman would be hanged and a member of the public would be appointed in his place. Other duties were taken on board. The kisans themselves took to policing the *ilaqa* and reporting every instance of injustice. Volunteers read aloud from newspapers and contacted the local kisans so that they might report any case of zamindari harassment.[32] The common cry was that no kisan should fear repression and they should unite and help every kisan who was being harassed. The kisans were also encouraged to formulate "ideal laws" on land tenure in many kisan sabhas. The *netas* urged the kisans to come forward and make suggestions. The message was to confront injustice and not to cower before authority. In Azamgarh, Jharkhande Rai said that in Fyzabad, villagers marched each day to the District Magistrate and the Superintendant of Police and "caused their hearts to tremble". Virendra Verma told the kisans to shout *uloo* (fool) at the police and *patwari* if they sent for them. They said that kisans should fight the zamindars and not give up their fields.[33] Confident of success, a spirit of defiance encouraged many collective acts of organised resistance that

[31] *Ibid.*, also Y.D. Gundevia, In the Districts of the Raj, (Bombay, 1992,), p. 139.
[32] PAI, 1939, p. 286.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

led to widespread rural unrest from 1938 onwards.

Another enduring feature that illuminates the separate identity of popular politics was the method of voluntary contributions of grain by individual kisan households in each village. The *mandal* offices maintained accounts of the grain received and could monitor the nature of support and assistance. By the late 1930s, many kisan households were involved in giving *chutki*, *muthia* or *karkhani* to the kisan organisation in their village or locality. The DCC adopted these popular practices and many leaders advocated it on their lecture tours in the villages. For instance, at one meeting in Khasraha village, Rudhauli, Sita Ram Shukla asked about 400 persons to save a handful of corn from their daily food for the *kartas* who were touring that region.[34] Other sections of rural society were drawn into funding the movement such as grain merchants and shopkeepers.

Broadly speaking there were two kinds of movements against *julum* which took root during the late 1930s and continued for after Independence. They varied in size depending on the nature of the district and local kisan organisations. There was a difference in political tone between the movements in big zamindari areas (particularly the trans-Rapti tract), and those in the south. The focus of the movements in the south was on issues such as the payment of recorded rent, abolition of *hari, begar* and illegal levies. However, in the trans-Rapti movements, which were primarily organised by the kisan sabhas, the main demand was for the abolition of zamindari. They also advocated the correction of land records and granting of *milkiyat* (permanent tenure rights) to the kisans.

Although there was little trace of official Congress ideology in these movements against *julum*, certain members of the DCC were actively involved in as-

[34] *Ibid.*

sisting the kisans. The fissiparous and ambivalent nature of Congress organisation at the supra-local level made it permeable at the local level. Support for the Congress was based on the kisans' conceptions of what the Congress was, and would do, rather than what it claimed to represent. The multi-dimensional identity of the Congress gave it greater credence than it deserved in 1940s. For instance, in Maharajganj, Shibbanlal Saxena, critical of the conservatism of the other members of the DCC, formed a separate sub-committee which worked independently, primarily aiming to "check zamindari excesses", by starting a Congress *mandal* among the kisans in Maharajganj.[35]

The physical presence of thousands of kisans demanding the end of *julum* transformed the rural and political landscape. They were not spontaneous outbursts but derived their power through kisan *sangathans* (organisations). At the level of organised politics, the sanctioning of violence and the attack on various forms of deference to authority by local *netas* gave rural protest a new identity and ferocity. It was also a formal departure from Gandhism: the kisans did not cease to pay homage to Gandhi but interpreted him on their own terms.

The nature of leadership was crucial in determining not just the affiliations of local leaders and the kisan cadres but also "in setting the pitch".[36] In areas where the leadership was conservative and comprised mostly of petty zamindars, limits were imposed. The DCC in Basti is one example of this. It was against "class-struggle" as most of its members were petty zamindars. It aimed at the removing of illegal levies but did not advocate zamindari abolition.

At Ganeshpur, Pipra *ilaqa*, Molhu Bhar, a kisan walked to Basti DCC and

[35]PAI, 1939, p.133.
[36]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 19 February 1992.

registered a complaint in the autumn of 1938, describing the *julum* of the Pindari zamindars who exacted *begar* thirty-seven times a month.[37] The kisans were reportedly forced to perform *hari, begar,* and *charaghi* for thirty-seven days and seven nights and anyone who resisted became a victim of third-degree tortures. The President of the DCC was a popular local *neta* called Raja Ram Sharma who took action on hearing the complaint by organising a sabha with the help of a kisan named Sat. Meanwhile the zamindars falsely implicated Molhu Bhar fo stealing paddy and threatened the other kisans with dire consequences if they attended the sabha. The DCC informed the police about this threat and held the sabha in Ganeshpur.

About 10,000 kisans attended the sabha and pledged not to perform *hari* and *begar*. The zamindars fled to the thana by car but the kisans followed them; some of them assembled outside the thana. The police refused to record any charges against the kisans because they feared a confrontation with the assembly waiting outside. At that time many kisans believed that *swaraj* had come and the land they tilled was theirs although they had received merely temporary relief against illegal levies.

Another large movement occurred in Jagdishpur in Harraiya *tahsil*, Basti. It was reported that a zamindar's *goonda* set fire to a kisan's hut in Jagdishpur estate.[38] The Pandey zamindars demanded exhorbitant rents and exacted *ikhfah.* All these instances of *julum* were reported by an unnamed *karta* and subsequently investigated by Indrasen Singh, a member of the DCC. He was beaten mercilessly by the *lathials* of the zamindar. Upon hearing this news, a huge gathering of several thousand kisans surrounded the residence of the zamindar, and shouted

[37]Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal.
[38]PAI, 1939, p. 102.

abusive slogans. The kisans stopped paying all forms of illegal levies and rent was reduced to a nominal amount. The issue of landownership was not stressed so the achievements of this movement were to remain a short lived triumph.

In sharp contrast, the movements organised by the Communists in the trans-Rapti demanded permanent ownership rights for the kisans. Further, the trans-Rapti region had an active kisan sabha which was organised by the Communist party. There were several Communist *kartas* who had been trained by Sheetal Tripathi, Ganga Sharan Pandey, Dwaraka Prasad and others working in Bansi *tahsil*. They mobilised kisans from other neighbouring localities such as Barhni, Shorhatgarh, Alidapur, Birdpur and Neora. Their methods and tactics varied from the Congress-led movements. Unlike the Congress, they attempted to unify the anti-zamindari movements. The *rathri pathsahalas* systematised the education of the kisans in socialist doctrine. In the trans-Rapti, the kisans were taught to differentiate between the two parties, the Congress and the kisan sabha, with respect to ideology, social composition and issues at stake. They were told that the Congress was a collective organisation of all sorts of people like *mukhtars, vakils*, and a few zamindars who wanted to establish *swaraj*, whereas the Communist kisan sabha was a purely kisan organisation which acted on their behalf, thus emphasising class struggle. The kisans "who were infatuated with the Congress had to be told that it was not the Congress, but the kisan sabha or the socialists who were representing their cause".[39] The failure of the ministry to live up to its promises had been a significant indicator of the shape of things to come. Ram Ujagar Sharma, a prominent local *neta* accused the ministry of having done nothing for the kisans. He said it was important to set up a Rashtriya Sena of twelve

[39]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, 8 February 1992.

men from each village and advised the kisans to use *lathis* in self-defence.[40]

There were several large kisan movements in these areas which were particularly strong, and reverberations were felt all over eastern U.P. The rising figures for crime against property and acts of dacoity alarmed the administration. Official sources in 1939 were forced to note that subversive activities, particularly by the Communists, took "a definite turn for the worse" with "a common objective of leading the masses to violent revolution".[41] The success of the kisan movements under the Communists in gaining land ownership rights paved the way for the subsequent popularity of this party.

To start with, a few representatives from the Basti DCC visited this area at the behest of the kisans and filed reports against the false land entries and rent. In Basti, the DCC did not wish to alienate the zamindar. Important Congress leaders were brought in to settle matters amicably. At one such conference, attended by Acharya Narendra Dev and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, a tea party was organised by the Raja. The kisans gathered outside and shouted "you are not drinking tea but our blood". The leaders came out and the Raja promised to assist them. However, he sent Ajit Pal Jain, the parliamentary secretary, who prevaricated and got lawyers to prove that the rent was legal. Meanwhile, the Congress leaders did not offer any ready solution and delayed proceedings. Another matter which tarnished the Congress image locally was the corruption of certain *netas* such as Ram Kumar Sastri who was alleged to be working for the Raja as the latter had gifted some land to him. These actions turned the kisans against some of the Congress-led kisan sabhas. They threw shoes at Ram Kumar when he tried to address the assembly and the Congress-led kisan sabha quickly lost its mass

[40]PAI, 1940, p. 27.
[41]Report of the Administration of the Police, File 75/IV-A /40, NAI.

appeal.

The organisation of these movements was swifly taken over by the Communists, resulting in one of the most successful kisan agitations in eastern U.P.[42] It continued for several decades after Independence.[43] The zamindar and their *karindas*, with the assistance of the police, had terrorised the kisans by serving eviction orders against them. Shivpati Singh had gained notoriety for his tyranny and practice of *bedakhli*. On one occasion in 1935, he served 70,000 writs of eviction on the kisans in the villages of Karhariya, Khinwa and Pakhani nagar, and they had to walk fifty-two miles in the bitter cold to fight court cases and were rapidly pauperised by court expenses. Further, the Raja tried to create communal tensions amongst the kisans but was unsuccessful, because the kisans "were on their guard and conscious of class solidarity".[44]

Over 10,000 kisans (men, women and children) organised by the Communist Party gathered and demonstrated against the Raja and his men; they sat outside his residence throughout the night. The District Magistrate intervened and said that the Raja had to adjust the *ijafa* (extra) rent as an advance payment of rent and return the kisans their land or he could be jailed. He immediately agreed to those terms. Although he retained the excess rent and dues, the farm lands in Churher, Siyan, Baidaula, Karhiya and Khunwa which were irrigated by the kisans, became *tasdik* and the kisans were granted *milkiyat* rights; every kisan's *parcha* was signed by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and the Raja's *mukhtar*. These papers were presented to the District Magistrate. The Raja

[42]Interview with Prakash Chandra Pandey, Basti, 25 December 1991, who was among the many former Communists to point out proudly that this movement was mentioned in the Izvestia and the Pravda.

[43]Interviews with Sheetal Tripathi, 9 February 1992, and Prakash Chandra Pandey, 24 December 1991.

[44]Personal communication from Balbadrinath.

was forced also to return Rs 5,000 to the kisans, this was the amount taken as *nazarana*. The success of the agitations led by the Communists (in contrast to those led by the Congress) was a political education for the kisans and accounted for the tremendous support and good-will shown towards the party during the next decade.[45]

There was a decisive shift in policies of the Congress ministry. It seemed that the Congress "while fighting the raj was also becoming the raj, foreshadowing the great but incomplete transformation of 1947".[46] Although the intellectual and emotional subtlety of Congress politics was not grasped by the average kisan, its significance was not entirely lost to the local *netas* who "had slowly begun to see the light" which was compared to the enlightenment of the Buddha.[47] Many of the *netas* had been working inside the Congress for over a decade and felt cramped by its style. Some of them had graduated in political experience, beginning with the Gandhian ideals, then been inspired by the revolutionary terrorism of Bhagat Singh and finally moved towards revolutionary socialism. To them, intuitively and experientially, this transition was a rite of passage, an inevitable stage in the life-cycle of politics.

The party had developed as a viable alternative to the Congress. Many radical local *netas* set up agitational links with the kisan sabhas, as they became impatient with the ambivalence over the kisan question. Many were attracted to communism. In Basti, the Communist Party office was set up in a house belonging to a local lawyer, Babu Ganpat Sahai, and later another office was established at Maharaj Harinath's residence. Political pamphlets and newspapers

[45]Interview with Prakash Chandra Pandey, Basti, 25 December 1991.
[46]Sarkar, Modern India 1885–1947, p. 255.
[47]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 24 September 1991.

were distributed secretly through personal contacts and *rathri pathshalas*. On account of the active assistance of the Communist Party and kisan support, the number of party members in Basti rose from less than a dozen in 1944 to 104 in 16 September 1946 and 465 in the beginning of 1947.[48] The political map spread to over 500 villages and 50 committees were established. The actual membership of the kisan sabha was 5000. An important aspect of the movement was the political participation of women. They enrolled and worked as full-time party members and they assisted in enrolling other women and educating them on the new phiosophy.[49]

This movement at Shorhatgarh made a powerful impression and sustained several smaller movements in other parts of the districts. They resulted in the instituting of land records operations to grant the kisans *milkiyat* rights. For instance, at Devariya *mandal* in Dummariaganj, the Choudhary "committed atrocities" on the kisans.[50] Any kisan who disobeyed the orders of the zamindar had to forfeit his field; in the absence of an organisation, the kisans were terrified into a state of passivity. Then local *kartas* took the initiative to go to these places and work hard to recreate the atmosphere. Balbadrinath, a radical Congress *karta*, volunteered to go there after a complaint reached the kisan sabha. Devkhali Sumanji accompanied him. They used to wake up at 3 a.m. and visit the kisans' *abadi* to persuade them to attend the assembly. After a few encouraging words, they took out a *phera* and walked about the villages. Kisans were told that it was easy to give up the struggle but hardship would never cease that way. They ought to take up cudgels against the zamindar, and fight to the end.

[48]Interview with Prakash Chandra Pandey, Basti, 25 December 1991.
[49]Interview with Jaggi Devi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 10 February 1992.
[50]Personal communication from Balbadrinath.

The battle had to be won and no-one ought to allow the fight for injustice to stop short of outright victory. After a few days, the kisans plucked up courage and were prepared to march to the Raja of Changera's residence and assert their rights. In the following year, another sabha was held in front of the *tahsil* court and representations were sent to the judges to resolve the cases in favour of the kisans. The *netas* and *kartas* travelled through the districts by train, bus and bullock cart; but in order to reach the villages, the last leg of the journey was usually undertaken by foot.[51]

Although Congress was in a position to introduce legislation in 1937–38, it was almost always at the repeated insistence of local leaders and the kisans that reform on land tenure was undertaken. Sometimes the *neta* had to force the issue: For instance, one such case can be cited from the movement in Maharajganj in 1939. Shibbanlal Saxena, in the presence of 1,000 wounded (they had been beaten by the zamindars' men) kisans, persuaded Rafi Ahmed Kidwai to set up a land records operation in Maharajganj in the wake of the kisan agitations of the 1930s. But the troubles of the kisans did not end there. In spite of the ministry instituting a land records operation, the field-by-field research of the *kartas* involving details of land tenure was put aside by the officials: malpractices and delay by the administration continued in nearly all the cases. It was clear that the whole operation was not just corrupt but also self-defeating. For instance, Saxena criticised the police presence in directing the record operations of the Lehra estate.[52] So the kisans gathered to protest in defiance of orders under Section 144 CPC. and there were about a dozen arrests. Bishwanath Mukherji and other *netas* such as Saxena travelled around the region to educate the kisans

[51]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.
[52]PAI, 1 April 1939, p. 62.

on this problem. Saxena visited Ghughli and said the record operations should be boycotted and told the audience of kisans to be fearless and unmindful. The visit by the Commissioner was cancelled, so he would personally lead a kisan march to Lucknow. He said *parchas*(papers) would be corrected, by force if necessary and the *kartas*, were put in charge of the record operation.[53]

At other times senior district officers were asked to intervene. In 1938, at Shahpur, one unnamed kisan had complained about the *julum* of Shivpati Singh, the Raja of Shorhatgarh. The zamindar had claimed their land as *khudkasht* and taken their harvest. The *netas* collected these individual stories and reported the matter to the Collector, who dismissed them as troublemakers who were inciting the kisans. Ram Shankar Lal, Ram Bodh Lal, Inderjit and Balbadrinath returned to Shahpur and organised a *jatha* of kisans. Over 10,000 kisans walked eighty miles to the Collector's residence. Many kisans left their fields and had joined the *jatha*. There were serious riots in Dummariaganj in December 1939 against the realisation of rents. Six tenants injured three members of the zamindar party and 41 kisans and twelve men of the zamindars' party were arrested.[54] This led the Collector to authorise a land records operation in Dummariaganj and a separate one for Bansi *tahsil*. By 1943 it was noted that in twelve villages of Basti assessment of land revenue was complete and 67 villages of Dummariaganj *tahsil* the *khatas* had been corrected.[55] Similarly in Phulpur *tahsil,* map corrections on 174,767 acres and re-survey of 207,145 acres were undertaken. The field-operations were finished in April 1941 in 761 villages and the remaining 272 villages would be completed later.[56]

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[53] *Ibid.*
[54] Personal communication from Ram Shankar Lal, also PAI, 1939, p. 1.
[55] UPRAR, 1944, p. 36.
[56] *Ibid.*, 1943, p. 20.

Land record operations gave the kisans great hope. Y.D. Gundevia, the settlement records' officer for Maharajganj *tahsil* recalls "working with the Congress" in 1938–9.[57] He noted that although the *tahsil* staff recorded low rents, the zamindars demanded three to four times *begar* on *sir* which was ploughed, sown, irrigated and harvested by the kisans and a pittance of harvest was sometimes given to the tenants.[58] Between August 1937 and July 1940, a 1,000 red shirt (left-wing support) *kartas* were taught and trained to work for the record operation. The kisans' names were recorded in the *patwari* papers. Fields were examined in each village, the incorrect entries were removed and fresh maps made for each village. About 50 *patwaris* were warned that they would be dismissed if they obeyed the zamindars. It was reported that 114 villages were selected for re-survey and the records of 76 villages mainly involved correction of village maps and *khatauni* papers.[59]

Thus, in the trans-Rapti region, the kisan sabhas played a pivotal role in seeking redress for the kisans, particularly in the case of those organised by the Communists, the movement in Maharajganj being an exception, as has been illustrated in the account given earlier. However, these developments have not been taken into account in Chandan Mitra's analysis of popular politics in Ballia. He does not take cognisance of the importance of the kisan sabha in eastern U.P.—to quote, "in comparison to Bihar, the kisan sabha was never renowned for its militancy in Ballia or in any other district of eastern U.P", and thus underplays its powerful role in mobilising the kisans.[60] It was largely on account of the

[57]Gundevia, In the Districts of the Raj, Chapter 3.
[58]*Ibid.*, p. 141.
[59]UPRAR, 1938, p. 26.
[60]Chandan Mitra, "Popular uprising in 1942: The case of Ballia", in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), The Indian Nation in 1942 (Calcutta, 1988), pp. 172, 181.

ferocity of kisan sabha movements as these that there was zamindari abolition.

Quite suddenly, the growing promise of reform was aborted by the resignation of the ministry in U.P. in September 1939 following the Congress Working Committee decision. This put an abrupt end to official attempts to redress the kisans' problem and the land records operations was simply abandoned. The zamindars took over the reins of power again, much to the despair of the kisans as Shibbanlal noted in a lengthy letter to Nehru. His letter coveyed the prevailing mood among the kisans. He stated that in Maharajganj, there were 50,000 acres of *farizi sir* and *khudkasht* land that had to be redistributed. The corrections on 30,000 acres had been completed. The *khatas* had to have rent rates which the recording officer was having difficulty with as the zamindars refused to help. Out of the 60,000 *khatas*, 38,000 were classified as statutory with undetermined rent. There were thousands of cases filed in the courts involving over 25,000 tenants. The litigation had ruined the kisans because in some instances there were seventy-three hearings for a single case. Once again the courts came under the zamindars and hearings were postponed repeatedly. Rents were increased to over Rs 200,000, that was, a 25% increase, instead of the agreed 17% over the previous rental. Shibbanlal complained that although he had made a representation to Kidwai on 6 July 1940, it was to no avail, because he had been arrested along with the *kartas*. So, instead of ameliorating the misery, the Congress had dealt a sledge-hammer blow to any forseeable improvement. In Maharajganj and Pharenda, the zamindars were filing suits at Rs 20 a day against the kisans. Several thousand cases had been filed and the sub-divisional Officer tried to bring about a compromise which favoured the zamindars. Saxena and the *kartas* prevailed upon the kisans not to

compromise: the fight against tyranny had to be resolved in their favour.[61]

Shibbanlal believed (and his opinions were shared by many *netas*), that many senior Congressmen were making no conscious effort to understand the plight of the kisan. It was not simply a case of the district officials supporting the zamindars on the 25% increase in rents. The Congress ministry had been directly responsible for the revised assessment, and thus had legalised all illegal exactions. Further, it annulled all the remissions that were due to the kisans. These problems were also affecting the remaining portion of the tract, the *tahsils* of Bansi and Dummariaganj. Nowhere was the breach between the official Congress and the kisan movements expressed more clearly than in the continuing movements against *julum*.

By the early 1940s it was widely stated by the kisans of this locality that the Congress ministry was simply not worth trusting anymore.[62] One kisan *neta* from Shorhatgarh summed up the feeling among his colleagues about the tenuous nature of the Congress-kisan relationship. It was a slogan which, by way of repeated recitation, aimed to condemn the failure of the ministry and the hollowness of the Congress ministry from the kisan perspective.

> Dui na hoyen ek sangh khuyala,
>
> hasab thatai phulaab gala.[63]

("Two things cannot coexist like laughter and a swollen throat.")

The leaders toured these regions and gave several public lectures criticising the Congress. For instance, Subhas Chandra Bose lectured in January 1940 in

[61] Jawaharlal Nehru papers, Part I, LXXX X, 1940, Letter from Shibbanlal Saxena to Nehru, 10 August 1940, NMML.
[62] Interview with Vijaypal Chamar, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh. 9 February 1992.
[63] *Idem.*

Kateshwar Park, Basti, where he criticised Gandhi and said his methods were in no way different from the Viceroy or Viceregal pronouncements. It was impossible to compromise with imperialism. No settlement was acceptable unless it was based on the total withdrawal of the British, and the handing over of the country to the Indian people. He concluded by stating that, if the need arose, a civil disobedience movement would be launched against the Congress and the British. New forms of political behaviour were advocated by various parties to defeat the colonial administration. For instance, in March 1940, the RSPI began its own training camps.[64] The training of the youth league for the conference in Surajpur, involved the training of the villagers. It aimed to better that of the police.

Meanwhile violence remained a powerful component of the social and cultural reality. To quell further attempts by the kisans to challenge their official authority, the zamindars adopted extreme and coercive methods. Many violent acts were committed against the kisans and their families. In addition important kisan leaders were arrested. From the early 1940s, the zamindars actively used communal and caste differences to create strife within the movements. Many kisan leaders believed that the zamindars felt threatened by the articulation of a class identity by the kisans. For example in Tejgarh in 1940, Raja Ashtbhuja Prasad charged an exorbitant fee to all kisans who claimed rights over the land. Those who could not pay were beaten and removed from their homes. Among them were Ayodhya Prasad Bodh Pandey. They had been beaten with shoes and the moustache of the Bodh Brahmin was forcibly removed and he prohibited any of them from taking water from the well. This constituted the worse form of public humiliation for a Bodh Brahmin was recognised by his moustache. To add

[64]PAI, 1940, p. 111.

insult to injury, a Pasi and a Muslim kisan were asked to occupy their homes.[65]

To retaliate against the zamindar, over 2,000 kisans gathered in the field of Baba Tek Ghar which was opposite the Raja's palace. Ram Bodh Lal, Ganga Sharan Pandey demanded an apology from the Raja and immediate redress of the kisans' grievances. The kisans surrounded the residence of the zamindar who was forced to appear and tender an apology to all present. He was "stripped of his clothing" (meaning stripped of his honour) and thus publicly humiliated.[66] He had to repay the losses of the kisans by forfeiting his *sayar* income. Another example of a zamindar initiating communal strife in Dummariaganj *tahsil* happened during the 1940s. The zamindar, nicknamed *Khooni* Nazir, sought to crush the movement by the kisans who were largely Hindu and ordered them to vacate their homes. The remaining Muslim kisans were asked to occupy their homes and take over their lands. But these acts did not create communal strife, rather the opposite happened: the kisans remained united.[67]

Elsewhere the resistance spawned a kind of resilience. Where such leaders were few and far between, popular unrest simply went under. For instance, in Bairari village there was no kisan organisation. So when a few kisans tried to resist *julum*, the zamindar's *goondas* plundered their homes and set them on fire; the entire *khaliyan* was burnt. They were forced to face utter poverty. Although they sent a petition to the court it was unsuccessful. Sometimes individual kisans took the law into their own hands. For instance, in 1940 it was reported that an important zamindar, Lakshmi Narain Pandey of Neharia village, had been murdered by a kisan in broad daylight. He was said to have been a very hard

[65]Interview with Dwaraka Prasad, Lucknow, 10 March 1992.
[66]Prakash Chandra Pandey, Mangalsootra (Lucknow, 1985), p. 191.
[67]Interview with Dwaraka Prasad, 5 April 1992.

taskmaster and a great deal of litigation had taken place between him and his tenants.[68] All these incidents led a spirit of defiance which were inherent in the Quit India movement of 1942.

Quit India: "Capture power now"

The "Quit India" proposal on 8 August 1942, followed by the immediate imprisonment of Gandhi, triggered widespread unrest. Gyanendra Pandey notes that in terms of popular politics, the intensity of Quit India had a good deal to do with war-time conditions.[69] In the volume edited by him, contributions by historians on the nature of resistance, identity of the participants, and the symbols behind which they united indicate that Quit India was far from being solely a Congress rebellion. On the contrary, the inherent tensions in the Congress and the national movement came to the fore in its ensuing "contest of identity, method and purpose" [70] Pandey notes in this connection that in eastern U.P. and Bihar, there was an ongoing tussle between the spirit of non-violence and the ideology of violence;[71] although Gandhian and Congress symbols were used by the masses, the spirit was clearly closer to revolutionary terrorism advocated by Bhagat Singh , forcing the pace of the movement.

Historians have varying opinions on the leadership, ideology and religious aspects of 1942. For instance, Paul R. Greenough has commented on the anomalies by which the Congress represented its case to India and the world. There was a contradiction between Gandhian non-violence in theory and in practice which

[68] Leader, 23 November 1940.
[69] Gyanendra Pandey, "The revolt of August 1942 in eastern U.P. and Bihar" in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), The Indian Nation in 1942, p. 123.
[70] David Arnold, "Quit India in Madras: Hiatus or climateric" in *Ibid.*, p. 207.
[71] Pandey, The Indian Nation in 1942, Introduction, p. 12.

was a regular feature of the earlier national satyagrahas in 1920-22 and 1930-32.[72] However, he notes that 1942-44 was different. It was not *ahimsa* which was Gandhi's distinctive combination but "Do or Die"—the call for ultimate sacrifice that was to be the final struggle.[73] Gyanendra Pandey, writing after Greenough, sees it differently. He argues that "the *mantra*" in 1942 was the same in 1920–22;[74] issues, themes and symbols which Gandhi himself had articulated remained central to the struggle.

Pandey also notes that there are many factors that require investigation at the level of politics from below. Certainly the shortages caused by World War II sharpened popular consciousness against colonial rule, and various strata (except for the *élites* and government officials) participated in the movement. So, it is difficult to agree with Max Harcourt's claim that Quit India was primarily a protest by the small-holders who were hard hit by the inflation in 1942, or, even that it was "led loosely and co-ordinated by a modernist *élite*".[75] On the other hand, Stephen Henningham has argued more persuasively that it was a dual revolt revealing two independent and separate streams, one led by small landlords and rich pesants, and another led by the lower-castes, the subalterns.[76] But it is difficult to accept his proposition that low-caste participation was primarily motivated by "looting" due to the general economic crisis.

The administration took serious measures to crush any fresh upsurge of protest.

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[72]Paul R. Greenough, "Popular mobilisation and underground literature of the Quit India movement 1942–44", Modern Asian Studies, 17, 3, 1983, pp. 353-86.

[73]*Ibid.*, p. 361.

[74]Gyanendra Pandey, "The revolt of August 1942" in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.) The Indian Nation in 1942, pp. 158–59.

[75]Max Harcourt, "Kisan populism in Bihar and the eastern United Provinces" in D.A. Low (ed.), Congress and the Raj, p. 323.

[76]Stephen Henningham, "Quit India movement in eastern U.P. and Bihar: The dual revolt", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, II, (Delhi, 1983), pp. 130–179.

The DCC offices were raided in all these districts and locked by the police. This was followed by the arrests of all prominent Congress *kartas*, leaving the kisans to be mobilised mainly by students. Quit India was chiefly a student movement. The students represented the new generation—less patient with the Congress and more prepared to challenge its values—and they deeply resented its efforts to take credit for the movement—"Hamare naach mein yeh log kuud gaye; hamara tyaag ka najaiyish phaida utaye".[77] Many of the students who participated in this movement had grown up in the villages, for instance, Prakash Chandra Pandey, Kallu Dubey, Ramanand Gupta, and Paras Nath Mishra. They were broadly of a left persuasion and returned to assist in a "mass struggle". These students from Banaras (Banaras Hindu University and Kashi Vidyapith in particular) played a significant leading role in the movement and introduced the idea of destroying communications and thus seizing power—the rest followed.[78] Their actions was not based on directives from the Congress but on individual initiatives. They were inspired more by the Russian revolution than Gandhism, and wanted to stir up the masses and the kisans.

Many of my informants noted that the overwhelming influence of the student movement in 1942 cannot be discounted. They believed that the importance of such acts against the authorities would transform the social environment and advance the cause. The students had various political intentions such as hoisting the tricolour over public offices and declaring Congress raj by advocating the ideology of freedom in the countryside. Some historians advocate that it was a movement of the youth.[79] This was also the view put forward by many kisan

[77] "They took advantage of our sacrifice and tried to dominate us", interview with Vidyadhar Dinesh, Ritukhor village, Gorakhpur, 9 May 1992.

[78] Interview with Paras Nath Mishra, Lucknow, 12 October 1991.

[79] David Arnold, "Quit India in Madras", p. 12.

netas I met. The militancy and sacrifice of the youth inspired by Bhagat Singh and Subhas Chandra Bose became enshrined in popular verse:

> Goli kisne khaya? nawjawanon ney,
>
> Hathiyar kanoon radh karoo,
>
> Kothiyan kisne jalai? nawjawanon ney,
>
> Hawaldar kisney mara ? nawjawanon ney,
>
> Tar kisney kata ? nawjawanon ney,
>
> Subhas Chandra zindabad.[80]

("Who faced the bullets? Young men did, Get rid of the violent laws, Who burnt the houses ? Young men did. Who beat the policemen? Young men did. Who cut the wires? Young men did, Long Live Subhas Chandra.")

There were innumerable significant events that took place within this short time-span which conveyed a complete sense of mastery over government injustice to nearly all the participants. As has been suggested, the mobilisation was impromptu and generated new meanings—1942 remained a powerful experience even after Independence. It was a time of great confusion but also of great hope. Many villagers mobilised quickly and followed any trustworthy person who appointed himself as leader. Nearly all the active *kartas* and *netas* had been arrested shortly after the raid in these districts, and other local Congress offices, so most of the leaders were self-appointed. Historical evidence suggests that they were not guided by rumour but conscious aims: to take advantage of the present vulnerability of the administration and seize authority. The kisans were attracted to the new philosophy and were prepared to break free of powerful social constraints.

[80]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.

The following song embodies the spirit of those times:

> A new world order is coming, all this suffering will come to an end,
>
> In this world there will be no one big or small, all will be equal, all will be brothers.
>
> In this world there are some who have hoarded money, many are dying of hunger.
>
> There are some who bathe in rose scented water, while many do not even have drinking water.
>
> There are those who never toiled in the sun, or worked in the fields, living in luxury they are looting the world.
>
> Only brothers come together, because we live through honest toil, unlike the light skinned white or zamindar: they thrive by doing us immeasurable injustice. Only then will this hunger go.[81]

Another important influence was the anti-war propaganda which was fairly widespread. For instance, in Azamgarh, many anti-British and anti-war speeches were reported. The average attendance at each meeting was 700;[82] but this could mean anything from 300 to 5,000. J.C. Chatterji addressed an audience of 3,000 in Kaptainganj and said that they should capture power now because no power on earth could prevent them from obtaining Independence. He asked them to stop all payment of rent and assistance in the war effort. He suggested the idea of a separate police force and an army. Ram Deo Singh, addressing a meeting of

[81]Rahul Sankritayan, Naike Duniya (Allahabad, 1946), p. 31. I would like to thank Mr. Amarnath Tewari for bringing my attention to these plays.

[82]PAI, 3 February 1940, p. 29.

200 kisans in Basti, urged the youth to be ready to sacrifice themselves by taking on such duties as the possession of jails and superintending the constables after disarming them.[83] On account of the acute shortage of food grains, cloth and kerosene oil there was frequent reference to the war during Quit India. It was argued the British were responsible for this shortage of essential goods which were being used to fight the war against Fascism in Europe. The *netas* argued this was ironic because the British were behaving worse than fascists towards them. Meetings were held all over the villages and the local *netas* strongly discouraged any assistance towards the war effort such as recruitment in the army, subscription to war funds or any work for the government. Instead, they advocated the immediate capture of power because the government was vulnerable and it ought to be attacked and *"purna swaraj"* achieved.

Another recurrent theme used in political propaganda was the belief in a German victory. It was widely believed that Britain was in the clutches of the Germans, so the *netas* advocated that it was necessary to capture power now, for example in a speech at Sahajanwa, Gorakhpur, attended by several hundred kisans, a speaker forbade anyone to join the army because armies were wiped out by the German guns at a distance of 175 miles. Algu Rai Sastri said that Hitler was sinking two or three British ships a day so they ought to take advantage of the present situation. The British government, he said had been sucking the blood of India for the last 100 years. The officials drew fat salaries while the peasants were starving so the audience was urged to refuse to subscribe to war funds.[84]

All these influences contributed to a return to the euphoria of the early 1920s

[83] *Ibid.*, 1940, p. 95.

[84] Interview with Edwin Chapman,(adopted son of Algu Rai Sastri) Banaras, 6 October 1991.

and a strengthening of political consciousness. During the early 1940s, the demand for land came to be identified with *swaraj*. Pandey shows how a distinction was made in official records between violence of the state and violence of the people during the 1930s and 1940s.[85] The violence of the state was ordered, rational and necessary, hence justifiable, while the opposite was true of the people. These attitudes are reflected in the court records, particularly in cases where the list of accused, the villagers, formed a large part of the "rabid and unruly mob" that attacked government buildings.

The evidence from the court records support these views. Clearly, the urgency of obliterating all marks and signs of oppressive government authority was the main feature of popular violence; many of the kisans who participated did so out of political conviction, and "hunger was a strong motivator".[86] For instance, it was noted on 14 September 1942 that Radhey Shyam and fourteen others of Chilkahar village gathered at 5.30 p.m. with a mob of 500 to 600 persons and arrived at the post office and set fire to the official papers and the office building.[87]

In another significant episode on 16 August 1942, 200 kisans walked to Kajha carrying several Congress flags and *lathis*, shouting slogans such as *"Inquilab zindabad"* (long live revolution).[88] They wanted to meet Simon Finch, the manager of the Kajha estate. But the servants said that the Sahib would not meet them because it was a Sunday. The crowd (described as "a mob"in court records) ignored the servants and their leaders Baijnath Dubey (secretary of the Kajha Congress committee), Ram Singh and Kedar Lal addressed the kisans. They

[85]Gyanendra Pandey, "The Prose of Otherness" in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds.) Subaltern Studies VIII, (Delhi, 1994), p. 191.

[86]Henningham, "Quit India movement in eastern U.P and Bihar", p. 248; also interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, 1 March 1992.

[87]Sessions Trial I, 1942, District court Azamgarh.

[88]Evidence from Sessions Trial 2 of 1942, Judgement 27-1-1943.

declared that the estate was now theirs and the manager should be thrown out. They told the servants not to work on the estate and preached that all government rules and orders should be disobeyed. The manager came out to play golf. Some of the crowd asked him to leave the estate as he was British and they did not want an *"angreezi sarkar"* any longer. The crowd surrounded him so he could not go anywhere. They entered his office and destroyed the papers, broke the iron safe and took his pistol. This allows us to explore another dimension of popular politics which aimed primarily to establish a kisan raj—and violence was directed against the coercive power structure, particularly in the form of official documents that perpetrated injustice.

The kisans who were present in this episode were from the neighbouring villages: Kajha (population 2500), Mirzapur (population of 500), Purwa (100), Pandi (1000) and the village *abadis* of Tandwa, Kamthari and Kammava. From the list of names, it appears that they were mostly lower-caste, although a few of their leaders were upper caste. In these movements caste was not a significant factor in mobilising support against authority. Gyanendra Pandey notes that the jail lists did not contain many Muslim names.[89] My study of court records in Azamgarh, Gorakhpur and Basti district on session trials during these years indicate otherwise. Although consciousness of differences existed, with respect to political participation, barriers of caste and religion were not a perceptible influence in the locality during this time in the villages. Nor was gender an issue that was addressed and politics took on the shape of the gender relations that existed. In the villages, lower-caste women were very much part of "the mob" that was against official terrror and *julum*.

[89]Pandey, "The revolt of August 1942" pp. 148–9.

The kisans who participated in burning police stations, wrecking post offices or confronting English estate managers, particularly welcomed measures to punish oppressive local figures such as the *daroga* and sub-inspector who assisted the administration and were the worst perpetrators of *julum*. For instance, the incidents in Tarwa thana, thirty-six miles from Azamgarh illustrates this point.[90] On 18 August 1942, 3,000 kisans gathered at half past one in the afternoon, carrying a Congress flag and shouted Congress and anti-government slogans.[91] Tej Bahadur Singh, a prominent kisan leader, asked the police to hand all over government property including armaments and uniforms. Unless these were delivered, they were warned that they would experience the same fate as the police of Sa'adat thana (nine miles away in Ghazipur district) which had been burnt two days ago, resulting in the deaths of the sub-inspector and a constable. The police obeyed all the orders and handed over the property to Tej Bahadur Singh who took the police into custody and locked them up. The tiles of the roof were broken and the quarters of the sub-inspector, Shah Jahan Baksh, was burned. He was particularly hated by the kisans. After that they went to the post office, six furlongs away. Jharkande Sonar, Lutavan Ahir and Dwaraka Ahir led the crowd inside and informed the the post master that the Congress government had been established and ordered the crowd to occupy the buliding. All unused postcards, stamps and envelopes were torn to bits outside the post office. The post-master was asked to give up his chair which was removed from him and a kisan from the crowd occupied it instead. The furniture was broken up and the post office was raided. The kisans were not seeking any personal financial benefits gained

[90]Village Crime Notebook, Tarwa thana, Rani ki Sarai tahsil, Azamgarh, First entry is dated 5 August 1919.

[91]Evidence from Sessions Trial 9 of August 1944, King Emperor vs Kedarnath Dikshit and 18 others, Azamgarh District Court records.

by these acts. They were against the authority of the colonial state.

Some village centres in each district, such as Tarwa, Gambhirpur and Atraulia in Azamgarh had a radical political tradition dating to the 1920s. Other villages were also affected by this great "tidal wave". Wherever the villagers encountered official opposition, they began to assert their own authority: the targets of destruction in nearly all encounters were the thanas, post offices, railway lines, stations, bridges and European estates such as Kajha and Alidpur. The plan was to destroy all communications and symbols of authority. The next step would be a takeover of power to "establish people's power".[92] One contemporary eyewitness report noted that wherever large groups gathered, nearly all the villagers assisted in breaking bridges and felling trees to construct road blocks to prevent army and police reinforcements from arriving. For instance, in Gorakhpur rail supply lines were cut off between Kasia and Padrauna and other important lines. Khajuwa bridge was destroyed on 21 August 1942. Subsequently total chaos was reported in Devariya, Salempur and Padrauna.[93]

On account of the arrests of prominent leaders, new leaders came into being who took charge and co-ordinated operations. For instance, in Azamgarh the thanas in Raunapur, Jiyanpur and the post office and *tahsil* of Sagri were dealt with by one group; another proceeded towards the thanas of Kandarpur, Maharajganj, Atraulia and Phulpur. Vehicles found on the way were destroyed. The bridge at Badegaon was broken up by 400 men who worked for five and a half hours.[94] The Railway lines were cut, as in Atraulia and Phulpur *pook*.

There were cases where revenge was cited as the reason for attacks on gov-

[92]Interview with Lakshmi Narain Pandey, Anandnagar, Maharajganj, 15 March 1992.
[93]*Idem.*
[94]Interview with Ramanand Gupta, Amila, 9 September 1991.

ernment property. For instance, Daulat Lal, a prominent local Congress *neta* of Phuplur and village school teacher was jailed for sedition. Just before his release in July 1942, the police burned his house. In retaliation, the villagers attacked the Khurason railway station on the Azamgarh/Shahganj track. A crowd of fifty or sixty men broke the locks and collected records and other papers from the stationmaster's office.[95] They set fire to the furniture. Police constables rushed to the station and opened fire. The local village schoolteacher and the *akharas* of Phulpur were blamed for the incident. Lal co-ordinated the Hindu and Muslim *akharas*. Despite local trouble makers such as Sheikh Qamar Hussein and Sadruddin, it was believed there was no dispute between the two groups during Dusshera; a special guard was not required for Holi, Muharrum and Kartik purnima.[96]

These accounts also suggest that it was a widespread, highly charged atmosphere. For instance, in Rampur police station (Azamgarh) the kisans were not allowed to hoist a flag on the thana by an officer so they looted the thana. The crowd became angry and shouted "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" and asked the sub post-master of Gambhirpur to state in writing that he was in favour of the Congress and said they would hoist the Congress flag in the school. The crowd consisted mostly of schoolboys. On 14 August, Belthra railway station located five miles from Mau was burned. 1,500 kisans came from the east, 200 came from the north, 1,500 from the west as well as another crowd of 5,500 in front of the district board armed with *lathis*, hammers, axes and spades.[97] They wanted the police "to fear them [the villagers] from limb to limb". They said no bullets

[95]Evidence from Sessions Trial 45 of 1943, District court, Azamgarh.
[96]*Ibid.*
[97]*Ibid.*

could harm them: they would pass through their breasts. It was undoubtedly the politics of retribution and the kisans were prepared to go the whole way.

The Madhuban incident which "rocked the whole tahsil" has received comparatively greater publicity on account of the District Magistrate R.H. Niblett's eye-witness report in his diary.[98] The police raided the Congress office at Dubari mandal and they tore up the tricolour flag. A crowd gathered and freed the cattle from the compound near Madhuban. It was believed that a group of them had burnt the post office at Fatehpur and walked to Madhuban. This was recorded in the the court case when the convictions were made on 25 September 1942. About 2,000 arrived, the crowd attacked, looted the cattle compound and burned part of the post office building. Then a large gathering of 5,000 carrying Congress flags, *lathis, ballams*, spades, hammers and other iron implements necessary for breaking the thana, surrounded it. The police began to shoot from the roof but there were so many people, that they had to wait for reinforcements which arrived much later. Meanwhile the crowd attacked the temple nearby because they suspected the sub-inspector was hiding there.[99]

This pattern was to repeat itself in nearly all the *tahsils*. In Basti, considerable damage was done to Gaur and Walterganj stations. Rana Pratap Ashram was a centre for student activity. On 23 August 1942, 500 men attacked a railway line at 4 a.m. in Dudhai and removed the fish plates.[100] The railway line at Dudhai was attacked at 4 a.m. by 500 men on 23 August 1942.[101] Later 200 men damaged government property at 11 a.m. Their leaders, Raza Mohammed

[98]R.H. Niblett, The Congress rebellion in Azamgarh: August-September, 1942, by S.A.A. Rizvi (Allahabad, 1957): also Special Trial Number 3 of 1942 dated 19-8-1942, District court, Azamgarh.

[99]Sessions Trial, 29 March 1945, Azamgarh district court.

[100]File 1307/33 of 1946, UPSA.

[101]*Ibid.*

Ansari and Awadh Narain were not released in 1946 because of their activities in 1942. In Kalativa village there was "a daring dacoity on the property of a government officer".[102]

Most of my informants said that for nearly four days in some villages and forty-eight hours in others, many kisans realised for the first time what it meant to be free of all authority. There was a serious shortage of food and many other problems—but, to quote one kisan, Vijaypal, "in the hunger for life I forgot my hunger". It was such a powerful feeling that many believed that this was the new world and worth struggling for. Alongside the violence to government property and disregard of authority, mockery and ridicule of the adminstration were common. For instance, in Dhoosi-Basantpur village, the kisans walked to other villages arresting the *chowkidars* and the *patwaris*. They put them in a "movable jail" made of *lathis* and poked fun at them. At every village they established a new panchayat and a new administration.[103] These developments were encouraged by the kisan movements that were happening and were subsequently to strengthen it. Pandey's and Chandan Mitra's own evidence suggest independent strains (outside the Congress) that resonate in these movements which gave Quit India its distinctive popular character.[104] Despite official condemnation by various parties, it was to influence decisively attitudes in the Congress and hastened the transfer of power.

Another important influence on popular consciouness which cannot be overlooked was the experience of prison during the 1940s. Many of the kisan activists recalled that they had received their most valuable political education during

[102] *Ibid.*
[103] Interview with Jagdish Pathak, Gorakhpur, 9 April 1992.
[104] Chandan Mitra, "Popular uprising in 1942: The case of Ballia", pp. 165–84.

their years in jail. There were influential leaders who were jailed and they used to give lectures and comment regularly on the political situation. They shared the intellectual disappointments caused by the conservatism of the Congress and probed the past for meanings that had not previously been evident. Study circles were formed and "the prison became an *abadi* where the *dehat ke log* received training in political philosophy",[105] creating a familiar atmosphere, remaining "ineluctably, even defiantly, part of his or her own society".[106] They also learned how to read and write and were attracted to Marxism. This was also possible because the colonial state, pragmatically, chose to limit the nature of its authority inside the prison, so that it remained "a remarkably permeable institution".[107]

Many kisan *netas* believed that almost every kisan who was jailed in the late 1930s and early 1940s became a Communist, an inevitability borne out of circumstance. Some of the *netas* who educated these kisans were Vishwanath Mardana, Sheetal Tripathi, Jagdish Pathak and Rustam Satin. They spoke in Bhojpuri and many subjects were discussed. It was necessary to liberate the kisans from traditional ways of thinking and they were also taught to become sensitive to the woman question and reject the old ways of seeing. They hoped that when the kisans left the jail, they would propagate these new ideas in the many *ilaqas* and bring about social change.[108]

Plays were staged in jail and they inevitably carried important political and social messages. The gender issue was frequently addressed such as in the plays by Rahul Sankritayan, an influential kisan leader. He questioned the position of

[105]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, 24 September 1991.
[106]David Arnold, "The colonial prison: Power, knowledge and peneology in nineteenth century India" in Arnold and Hardiman (eds.), Subaltern Studies, VIII, p. 186.
[107]*Ibid.*, p. 158.
[108]Interview with Jagdish Pathak, Gorakhpur, 9 April 1992.

women and urged them to come forward and take part in politics. Men were asked to encourage their sisters and wives to do the same. It was hoped that when the kisans returned to their villages they would propagate these teachings. The social upliftment of women would lead to their increased participation thus strenghthening the political movement against poverty, hunger and injustice. However their independent claims for land rights and social equality remained unaddressed.

The many faces of the Congress

The serious shortage of food and all essential goods continued even after the war. The movements against *julum* picked up after the release of the *kartas* and *netas* imprisoned from 1942–3 in 1945–6. Men, women and children participated in all these agitations. It is significant to note that these were mainly Communist-led agitations in the trans-Rapti.

The movement at Chatera reached a high point on 21 September 1946.[109] The Communists debated whether to follow the tactics of *satyagraha* or to harvest the crop. Thousands of kisans came from all over and gathered in Shorhatgarh railway station carrying red flags. They all voted in favour of harvesting it. There were over 10,000 kisans but about twenty constables and the *daroga* stood in a corner. It was guided by leaders like Sheetal Tripathi, Vijaypal Chamar and a few others who worked with the kisans. They carried red flags and harvested the crops. The police imposed section 144 CPC on the farms and the crops were to be auctioned under section 145, So at 5 p.m. thousands of men, women and boys started harvesting the crop of the fields which were to the west of the railway line. They were guarded by Achrajnath, Munshi Khan, Bafali Khan, Ram Dulare and

[109]Pandey, Mangalsootra, p. 225.

others who set themselves at the front armed with stone pebbles, canes and other things. About 2,000 kisans along with Balikaran Chaudhary, Prakash Pandey and others stood westwards beside the railway line to provide further security to the kisans.[110] The *daroga* rushed to the fields with the police and said that those farms were under police possession, though when queried he could not produce the field map. The crops were harvested and the kisans took them home. The kisans who had been working on the land were ready to harvest their kharif crop The entire area was about 220 *bighas*. The Raja's men arrived to claim the harvest but met with stiff resistance from the kisans. He declared section 145 CPC and auctioned the fields. There was an armed force to assist the Raja. The kisans were accused falsely under section 107 CPC. There were 27 kisans jailed in Chatera, of whom 16 had been members of the Communist Party. Gopal Baba, a 100 year old kisan had also participated and died in jail. He had been a very committed activist for over three decades.

Barhni village is another case of a movement influenced by Communism during the 1940s. The kisans of Barhni village were forced to work in the villages carrying their plough and driving their oxen to the zamindar's fields. They were forced to plough, sow and reap the crops (according to the season) by day and had winnow the crop by night. After that they were given two or three days' leave before continuing these tasks. Whenever the zamindar's coal supply arrived at the station they had to unload it and carry it to its respective place. This kind of forced labour was undertaken during rainy season also. Those kisans whose clothes were dry were whipped for not working; only those with wet clothes were paid wages. The main leaders of the movement here were Kallan Khan, Fateh

[110] *Ibid.*, pp. 230–32.

Muhammed, Naseebdar and Bhagirathi.[111]

The Choudhary of Dhekhari had a few *bighas* in Barhni. He got a kisan activist Masud Ali beaten so badly in 1938 that he had to spend six months in bed. The total area of Barhni was 600 *bighas* and it consisted of 300 *bighas* of false *sir* of the zamindar. The kisans of that area worked with *netas* from the the Communist Party in 1946. So the problem of *sir* needed to be solved before the kisans could claim ownership rights over the fields. Further, the Choudhary used to take half the portion of the crop although legally he only was allowed only 2/5. The *daroga* of Dhebrua tried to make a settlement and the zamindar was asked to provide a receipt of the crop he takes but he did not agree. In response the kisans took the entire crop home. The Communists party filed several cases against the zamindar. It was a fairly strong movement and continued for three years. Although the zamindar tried to incite communal tensions, it was not possible for him to destroy kisan unity.[112] The farms were registered in the names of the kisans.

The judgements of cases under Section 107 CPC against 35 kisans and five members of the kisan sabha was declared on 23 December 1946; the kisans and their leaders were fined Rs 200 as a penalty and the Sheikhs of Chatera were fined Rs 400 individually. Sheetal Tripathi who had been ill was charged under Section 514 CPC. These cases continued to be debated in the courts for nine months and caused the kisans an expenditure of Rs. 1,000.

During 1946–7, they could not cultivate their farms, which were confiscated by the state. The zamindar, Raja Shivpati Singh, continued to file cases under sections 379, 109 and 188 CPC; about seventeen kisans and thirteen workers of

[111]Interview with Naseebdar, Basti, 12 November 1991.
[112]Personal communication from Balbadrinath.

the kisan sabha who were involved in the Chetra case were arrested. The office-holders of the Communist Party, Sheetal Tripathi, Prakash Chandra Pandey and Krishna Chandra Sastri decided that all the kisan sabha workers and the Communists should court arrest. In spite of the acute shortage of food, the kisans donated money and gave paddy to get their leaders released. They donated two annas per *bigha* land and a *seer* of grain for party funds. These kisans began to collect donations from different villages.[113]

By the 1940s, almost every village had an important *neta*.[114] Many kisans I met in this region believed that it was a closely monitored, well-knit egalitarian kisan organisation, which transcended the boundaries of caste and religion. From the evidence, it seems that the kisan movements had transcended such differences and were able to unite against zamindari *julum* rather successfully.

It was also able to branch out into other movements. The kisans preferred to go to jail rather than to starve. There were movements against black marketeers enabling thousands of kisans to get cloth, salt and kerosene oil at Barhni, Shorhatgarh, Birdpur and Bansi. In 1945–6, the kisan struggles in Chetra, Barhni, Bargadi, Pakrihawan, Nadaw Ghumhawa, Sahrapur Chatara, Karhiya and other areas against false entries of *sir* and *khudkasht* were particularly successful. During the same period chief workers of the "Bolshevik" party, (as they called the Communist party) were Rajaram Choudhary, Ram Asrey, Munshi Dhanraj, Ramdev, Yadavgiridhari Lal, Shivdas, Nazeer Muhammed, and others joined these move-

[113]Pandey, Mangal Sootra, p. 228.

[114]One participant noted that they organised the agitations between 1939–46. They were Achrajnath of Karhiya village, Balikaran Choudhary of Pakrhi, Munshi Khan of Chetra, Bafali Khan, Chotkai Dhobi of Chetra, Pardesi of Sisai, Rahmullah and Birj of Sirhorwa, Ram Dulare of Chatera Palti, Vijaypal Chamar of Chatera, Chadni, Basdev, Kashi, Mukhtinath, Loole of Rawapur, Menesar, Lausa Gelhai, Ghurhu of Hahavir village Pritipal Sharma of Barhni area, Raj Moorat Singh of Sikta village, Sadr and so forth, interviews with Prakash Chandra Pandey, Basti, 25 December 1991 and Dwaraka Prasad, Bansi, 26 January 1992.

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The irony of these struggles was that they were happening with a Congress ministry under G.B. Pant once again in power in 1946–7; many Congressmen were assisting these zamindars. For instance, in Shorhatgarh the success of the movements led by the Communists in the neighbouring *ilaqas* of Chetra, Sehriya, Sisai, Sihorwa and other villages allowed the kisans to harvest the crops. In contrast, in Ramwapur village, Congress workers discouraged the kisans from harvesting the crops. They declared that it was an illegal act, as the fields were to be auctioned,and so these kisans lost their harvest and their claim to the land they cultivated. Further, the kisans were told that unless they ceased to be Communists or members of the kisan sabha they would be jailed. This frustrated many kisans who turned to the Communists for support.

The unity of kisans constituted a powerful presence, and their political consciousness gave them enormous bargaining power. In the trans-Rapti this had been achieved successfully primarily by the Communists and Socialists. However, the party leadership in both these cases advocated loyalty to the Congress ideology, for the kisans and the *neta* were to remain subordinate to the wider poltical differences. Party leaders on the left, for example, the Communist Party and Samajwadi Dal, believed that by working within the Congress they could capture it and change its thinking. This was in contrast to local leaders who regarded any alliance with the Congress with "visceral mistrust".[115] That is why they continued to stress the importance of the kisan sabhas. For instance, in Padrauna, Gainda Singh addressed a large gathering of kisans and stated that the Congress would not continue after Independence as it would be replaced by

[115]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.

several other parties. Hence the protection and help of the kisans could only be effected by the kisan sangh.[116]

Meanwhile the right wing was busy consolidating its position during the 1940s by undermining the left. The Congress in Lucknow and Delhi adopted cautionary measures from the start to control left wing influence in the demand for a kisan raj. Thus peace committees were proposed in every district along with the election work.[117] Any attempt to challenge the power brokers was regarded as excessive and disciplinary measures were adopted The radicals were usually expelled from the party, as was the case with Shibban Lal Saxena, who was periodically silenced for his views and prevented from holding any elective offices in the Congress.[118]

Following the disciplinary missive from the UPPCC, 40 members suspected of Communist leanings were forced to resign from the UPPCC and another 200 were threatened for disciplinary action. It also issued directives stressing the necessity for strengthening and regulating the Congress manifesto emphasising the enrolment of primary members, dissemination Congress news by means of posters and organisation of Sunday marches by volunteers. Sheoram Rai was one of the local *kartas* who had participated in these duties in Azamgarh. He admitted it was difficult to counter the influence of the RSPI and the Communists, both of whom were held in the highest regard by the villagers of Ghosi and Sagri *tahsils*.[119] The UPPCC ruled that a central body of villagers was to be organised to help protect the kisans in every village; one such was the *Prantiya Rakshak Dal* (Provincial Protection Army). It also decreed that Congressmen

[116] *Aaj*, 5 March 1947.
[117] PAI, 30 August 1946, p. 133.
[118] PAI, 14 December 1945, p. 12.
[119] Interview with Sheoram Rai, Azamgarh, 8 February 1992.

should try to control all elections, so that they could stay at the helm of affairs. It insisted upon the recognition of women workers—the next struggle was to organise women workers in the provinces. They had acted upon the observation that the Communists had enlisted several kisan women *kartas*, who were seen in the forefront of political activity.

Despite the outward changes, the UPPCC was reticent in its resolutions and rejected the proposals of a kisan rebellion to proclaim "deliverance day" for kisan raj on 15 April 1946.[120] The kisan sabhas emphasised the abolition of zamindari without compensation, the ending of kisan debt, the stopping of repression, and curbing of black marketeering; they also called for the redistribution of essential goods through fair price shops. Meanwhile, the UPPCC warned the DCCs against any misuse of the Congress name and exhorted them to maintain its revolutionary tradition by purging the party of opportunists. The Congress should act as a go-between the administration and the masses and co-operate with the kisans. The message was to promote reform, not revolution. But these strictures were not heeded by the DCCs (certainly not at the mandals), where the demand for a kisan raj proved ineradicable.

Congress during the transition: changing its tune

Despite the ambivalent attitude of the left to the Congress, its All-India network gave it an upper hand over the Communists and the Socialists; it also appeared to be changing tune by appropriating left wing sentiments as will be discussed. In general, it was still regarded "as a sacrament" by the kisan *netas* in most regions. Only a few kisan *netas* such as Pabbar Ram, Sheetal Tripathi, mem-

[120]PAI, 1946, p. 57.

bers of the Revolutionary Socialist Party and other Communists "were able to understand its reformist character".[121] That is why they never returned to its fold. Others believed (and hoped) that there would be changes in leadership and policy: schisms would foster healthy growth, thus the Congress Socialist Party had been formed by Acharya Narendra Dev and the Forward-Bloc by S.C. Bose. Many local *netas* saw through the intricate web of Congress politics and regarded it with visceral mistrust. They refused to co-operate and the movements against *julum* in certain areas such as the Shorhatgarh and Maharajganj continued to remain independent of all party directives.

Other problems that made matters more difficult were natural calamities such as the floods each year, and the standing crops were destroyed, homes were wiped out, and many thousands of villages and fields were submerged. Sometimes, even the land the kisans did possess was lost to them; in one reported case the land of a poor kisan was swallowed by the Ghaghra.[122] There was a great loss of human and animal life reported during the late 1940s.[123] Malaria and diseases wreaked further havoc. The problem of plague made matters worse; it was reported that the mortality rate had gone up, and many deaths unrecorded. Cholera was also spreading.[124] The suffering was so widespread and enormous that it broke the spirit of many men, women and children. They were visited by local *netas*, and many *kartas* like Manraj Yadav and Gopal Baba in Basti worked full time to help them.[125] Reassurances were constantly provided as the following couplet illustrates: "Vipati barabar sukh nahi, jo thode din hoi".[126]

[121]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.
[122]*Aaj*, 10 May 1947.
[123]*Aaj*, 24 August 1947.
[124]*Aaj*, 24 March 1947.
[125]Interview with Prakash Chandra Pandey, Basti, 25 December 1991.
[126]"Paradise [Congress raj] is to come in a very short while and bring with it such happiness,

On a popular level, the image of the Congress as "social healers" remained high; to many kisans it was attacking the official language of politics and the language of injustice of "the Hallett *sarkar*".[127] It was also engaged in food procurement schemes and encouraged the formation of *mandals*. It assisted in forcing the courts to issue stay orders on all original and appellate cases under sections 52, 171,178, 186 and 30(s) of the tenancy act.[128] Official authority continued to be seriously challenged, and the popular slogans of the time were defiant: "Khoon chuusnewaale, khoon se lengey, C-in C barbad, Wavell barbad".[129] The police were particularly despised for their repressive activities: 'Police walon ko naash ho, lal pagree peinkh do, chowk thana thor do".[130] Thus, the familiar patterns of political activity repeated themselves in more ways than one. The theme of *satyagraha* and non-co-operation with the government continued to operate: all actions had to counter the brutality of the zamindars who were assisted by local officialdom.

There were innumerable reports of physical torture on women and men (even children were not spared), the burning of homes, forcible cutting of crops, unjust prosecutions,and not providing receipts for rent. A zamindar of Tataiyan village broke the legs of a kisan who refused to pay *begar*.[131] The attacks on the kisans who (mostly Harijans) intensified.[132] For example, a zamindar named Jagrup in Bighwallih village abused the wives, daughters-in-law and daughters of the

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that it will overshadow the present suffering."

[127]Interview with Lakshmi Narain Pandey, Anandnagar, Maharajganj, 18 April 1991, Sir Maurice Hallett had gained notoriety because of his repressive administration.

[128]Hindusthan Times, 13 April 1946, I wish to thank Mr. Dulichand of the NAI for this reference.

[129]"The bloodsuckers will be butchered, damnation to the C-in-C and damnation to Wavell"

[130]"Destroy the police, throw the red turbans (i.e., strip them of all authority and destroy the police-station."

[131]*Aaj*, 4 August 1947.

[132]*Aaj*, 4 September 1946.

kisans. Budh Mahwal and Saghai were punished for demanding wages. Chakodi's pregnant wife was beaten badly. She suffered serious injuries, and the foetus died in the womb. Kisan sabhas were held wherever zamindari tyranny had been excessive; for instance, in Azamgarh in villages Kajha, Chapra, Karha, Walidpur, Akholi and Manikpur from 12 to 15 February, thousands of kisans met to confront *julum*.[133] Jai Prakash Narain, a prominent CSP leader had told some of them that the forthcoming revolution only depended on the help of 700,000 villages of Azamgarh; if each village sacrificed five lives, then an army of 3,500,000 could throw the British out of the country.[134] What is particularly significant about these times was that public demonstrations, meetings and processions were openly organised for the first time, after several years a total ban on open mass political activity.

Another theme that was propagated was Hindu-Muslim unity. The 1946 plan to partition India had made it particularly important to include other forms of representation for the transmission and preservation of certain ideas. The kisans in general could not be drawn into a prolonged communal conflict—the anxieties of existence gave them little respite. But they became aware of its divisive nature. Many kisans were puzzled by the bearing of these conflicts in relation to Partition.[135] It had been much more of an urban problem. Partition however was to have a powerful impact: it generated new fears and insecurities. The zamindars actively used the communal line to weaken the kisan unions. In Gorakhpur, Abdul Rahman stressed this unity and said the partition plan was an act of revenge.[136] He warned that by the end of the year British corpses would

[133] *Aaj*, 13 February 1947.
[134] *Aaj*, 9 February 1947.
[135] Interview with Pabbar Ram, Banaras, 8 September 1991.
[136] PAI, 19 August 1946, p. 133.

be strewn on the roads. Elsewhere in Deoria, the trainees of the Subhas camp at Kasia were given military instruction and the theme of unity was stressed.[137] All kinds of formal training camps were set up for educating the kisans and the youth in rural areas.[138] In Azamgarh, subscriptions were collected for training in land revenue at the party's district office. Some exhibitions were held with photographs showing the brutality of the police to the people, one such was held on the property of Ram Shankar. At a meeting in Mau, the Madhuban incident was recalled, and the kisans were asked to be prepared for another 1942—"such was the spirit of those times".[139]

The Congress recognised the powerful influence of the local *netas* who had vitalised the movement. It actively (albeit selectively), drew upon their categories, orientations and knowledge in defining its programmes, and it supported the local *netas* by continuing to insist upon the administrative role of the *mandal* panchayats to ensure that the kisans' grievances were recorded, and speedy justice administered. A common complaint was that kisans were being victimised and pauperised by the courts having to pay Rs 15 to Rs 20 to the lawyers who repeatedly postponed hearings.[140] In Ghazipur, kisan sabha workers formed a representation comprising ten kisans to ask the zamindar to withdraw ownership rights from the land near Ghat station the kisans did not have any money for a legal battle.[141] In Gorakhpur, the kisan Congress committee began an enquiry into the zamindar-kisan conflict in Sanichara village.[142] A zamindar of Badya village was oppressing the kisans of Maya kar tahri in Sadr *tahsil*: their huts were burnt

[137] *Ibid.*
[138] Personal comunication with Ram Shankar Lal and to Ram Muhammad Singh.
[139] Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 24 September 1991.
[140] *Aaj*, 16 January 1947.
[141] *Aaj*, 27 May 1947.
[142] *Aaj*, 26 June 1947.

and crops were forcibly cut. Elsewhere, the police of Peppeganj imprisoned the kisans on false charges;[143] another complaint was that there were still two dozen British zamindars and that meant *thekedari* raj. For example in Birdpur, the Dulha estate did not pay the *hal* rates to the kisans but had given charge to the *thekedars* who were punishing the kisans. The Congress party visited these areas, and assisted them in *sangathan*.[144] In Azamgarh, a zamindar of Manikpur village burned down a kisan's hut on 26 January at 9 a.m. to instil fear among them.[145] In Nawadih village, the Mahant stopped the water supply to Nandan, a harijan kisan's field. Following that incident, two *kartas* with a local *neta* Akshaibar Mal promptly restored the supply.

It is important to note that by the late 1940s, some of the kisans openly debated the nature of reform. There was a new confidence which enabled them to adopt the various roles of a prophet in order to right injustices and resolve social conflict.[146] This was a fairly widespread phenomenon: in Sapanehar village, Azamgarh, a group of kisans led by a leader of the "Bolshevik" party, occupied ten bighas of land under a zamimidar.[147] At many *sabhas*, kisans voiced their discontent against the laws, particularly the recent imposition of section 145 CPC and section 107 CPC and demanded radical reforms. After the attack on the villagers in Maya Badaiya village, in Basti, by armed *goondas*, the kisans said that the Raja of Changera should no longer be in charge of the lands, which should be handed to the court of Wards.[148] The people of Darhi village were annoyed with the *patwari* for keeping false records. When they caught him troubling a

[143] *Aaj*, 1 April 1947.
[144] *Aaj*, 25 March 1947.
[145] *Aaj*, 2 February 1947.
[146] Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.
[147] *Aaj*, 24 August 1947.
[148] *Aaj*, 4 June 1947.

Harijan woman, they punished him by pasting his face with *chuuna* and made him parade through the village.[149]

The values of sacrifice and honesty had to be accompanied by similar deeds—this was part of the Congress image. The shortage of essential commodities had led to the prevalence of blackmarketeering and corruption. Although a quota had been given for cloth for each district, there was never any stock for kisans who walked to the tahsil office from distant villages.[150] The filing of corruption charges against local officials, like the police, *patwari* or the *amin* was not uncommon; the *netas* and *kartas* filed numerous cases and held enquiries. In Azamgarh it was reported that a Congress *neta*, Dharamdutt Gupta, was being threatened by the kotwal because he had successfully charged a sub-inspector and ten constables with bribery.[151] Sometimes shopkeepers were prosecuted for withholding supplies of essential goods.

It is important to bear in mind, as already shown, the many representations of the Congress. In popular imagination it was not just a "government-in-waiting" , but also a symbol of all that was good; it would save the country from the shackles of oppression. It had forged a multi-class alliance at the national level and was regarded as representing the nation, so the failure of 1937–39 the Congress ministry did not destroy its mystique. To many respected leaders of the left, the true meaning of the Congress lay beyond the Ministry. They had seen it grow, and although they disagreed with its policies, they believed as Sahajanand did that "we cling to the Congress, not because of its magic or mystery ... but because it had not taken any false steps at critical junctures".[152] Despite trenchant criticism

[149] *Aaj*, 7 June 1951.
[150] *Aaj*, 8 May 1947.
[151] *Aaj*, 4 August 1947.
[152] Cited by Kapil Kumar "Peasants, Congress and the struggle for freedom 1917–1939" in

from its ranks and the rifts, the Congress always had tremendous support and power. However, in retrospect many local kisan leaders believed that "this Magna Carta status" made it possible for it to conceal its "bourgeois" character:[153] its eclecticism, divisions (chiefly between the right and the left) made it easy to permeate, its only strength was its anti-Imperialism and All-India organisation.

So, despite the growing ideological divide and periodic betrayals, the "chameleon" Congress had come to be regarded "as a sacrament" which could not be violated; so many different meanings had been attributed to it that it symbolised a myriad possibilities with a panacea for all ills. There also was little time for reflection and even the prolonged tussle for power between the left and the right wing inside the Congress was made subordinate to the immediate demand for *swaraj*. So the left wing parties ceased to oppose the Congress and began to co-operate with it.

In the years preceding the transfer of power, most of the parties such as the Samajwadi Dal, the Forward Bloc, and the Communists agreed to put fundamental differences aside and work with the Congress. For example, in Ballia, Chittu Pandey asserted that the army was with the Congress. Elsewhere in Deoria and Basti there were reports that "petty Congressmen" were interfering with the work of the police and government servants.[154] Many parties were active in distributing pamphlets and booklets like *Aeelan jung* advocating a revolution. These associations secured the conditions of survival for the Congress, enabling it to prolong its short shelf life as a champion of the *kisan/mazdoor*—on whom

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Kapil Kumar (ed.), Congress and Classes: Nationalism, Workers and Peasants, (Delhi, 1988), p. 251.

[153]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 7 February 1992.

[154]PAI, 2 June 1947, p. 43.

these truths dawned slowly.[155]

The Socialists formed an alliance with the Congress and by doing so shared its ideological gains with the Congress. Every village was encouraged to organise a vigil against zamindari oppression by forming mandal panchayats with a Congress *daroga* and two officers, for instance in Basti, it was decided that kisans from fourteen mandals would work full time and ten *kartas* would always be present to provide the much needed assistance.[156] The kisan sabhas would each have a kisan *fauj* for self-defence. Congress constables were appointed to patrol villages, to make public all complaints against the government and its officials, and to shout *"jai hind"*.[157]

Following the release of the political activists in 1945–46, the need for re-organising the Congress was being widely advocated by the UPPCC. The *kartas* and *netas* interpreted this missive on their own terms as a need to find an immediate solution to the realities of poverty, hunger and acute shortage of all essential goods. It was necessary to make the kisan question central to the struggle for political legitimacy. Every party made a serious attempt to incorporate the dialectics of kisan consciousness. For instance, the Congress utilised its radical rank and file (*netas* and *kartas*) at the *tahsil* and *mandal* level to define their criteria of political judgement.[158] It had been hard for the kisans to recognise "radical imitators" because the propaganda of all manner of groups was borrowed from an inherited culture and a common political language, whose nuances and gestures had encouraged the "march of their minds".[159] The kisans were told that

[155]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 8 September 1991.
[156]*Aaj*, 12 September 1946.
[157]Interview with Sheoram Rai, Azamgarh, 8 February 1992.
[158]Interview with Krishna Deo Rai, Surajpur, Azamgarh, 20 December 1991.
[159]Interview with Sheetal Tripathi, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 9 February 1992.

if certain structures were constraining, it was because *swaraj* was still to come. It had thus been able to engage in a process of collective legitimisation. At a general level, most of the political activists saw themselves as members of the Congress, so the popular understanding of the *Kangresiya* who habitually wore *khaddar* with the Gandhi *topi* and practised *swadeshi* remained favourable: they were the keepers of conscience.

Another important influence was the cult of the Indian National Army. It had a powerful influence in this region. Many soldiers, such as Ram Singh of Basti, were recruited for the British Army during World War II from this region and following their arrest some joined the INA in Burma. Subhas Chandra Bose had been popular among the kisans who described him with admiration as *"garam dar"* and included him in their images of the militancy of 1942 and the *Azad Hind Fauj* (INA) had many recruits from this region. All parties drew upon its reputation. The Communists voiced the need for a military organisation on the lines of the INA. They took out processions to celebrate "INA day" and also applaud the heroes of 1942.[160] Other parties sought to cash in on the popularity of the INA. The Revolutionary Socialist Party of India urged the kisans to learn how to storm the thanas from the discharged soldiers; the CWC had 60 members of the INA and its volunteer corps was drilled by Lt. Harish Chandra. By appropriating the symbols of the INA, the Congress gradually appropriated the appeal Subhas Chandra Bose had in this region.

In conclusion, the harshness of society, government and political circumstances transformed the kisans' conceptions of social justice, rights and aspirations. The militancy of the organised struggles during the late 1930s and 1940s was not

[160] Leader, 4 September 1945.

guided by the millenarianism of the 1920s, but by distinct class consciousness. Although the Communists and Socialists worked to bring about change and were successful in transforming the politics of the Congress, they were gradually marginalised and this fatally affected popular politics after 1947. While these parties invested their political support in the Congress, a few local leaders believed they had so seriously compromised the position of the kisan. To the *élite* the success of the Congress over the British spelt victory, but the kisans were also looking forward to zamindari abolition. It seemed that with Independence, the Zamindari Abolition Bill would never see the light of day. Once again Congress raj had to encounter an obstinate popular pragmatism which unfortunately had refused to accept all but the most conservative of lessons.

Chapter 5

The Movements of the Disinherited, 1947–1960

The kisans believed that the transfer of power to the Congress had been largely effected by popular support, that under such a government every policy would be measured against their needs, aspirations and collective consciousness. Many of their *netas* had been "infatuated" by "the sacrosanct identity" that the Congress movement had been able to forge on account of its sustained opposition to the *angreezi sarkar*.[1] They had built upon the symbolism of the Congress, which had little to do with the inner workings of the party or the ideology of the men-in-power. These *netas* were *kangresiyas*, and they projected (whilst propagating) their own political hopes, ethics and judgements upon the party which they had brought into office. Besides, most of the important Congress leaders had promised solutions based on their agendas and their circumstances which would embrace the fears and fantasies of the kisans.[2] After all, they argued, the Congress was in power now, and they could hardly hope for a better time than the present—under *swaraj*.

These developments injected a new lease of life and purpose into many opposition movements, among whom the Communists emerged as a powerful alternative

[1]Interview with Paras Nath Mishra, Lucknow, 21 September 1991.
[2]Interview with Ramanand Gupta, Amila village, 18 December 1991.

to the Congress. They accused the Congress of wilfully abusing the charter of freedom: it had crushed popular demands and forced the labour (*kisan-mazdoor*) movements to surrender their values. In this chapter certain important movements will be examined, and once again the quest will be to analyse how the circumstances, parameters and "autonomy" of subaltern protest are to be understood.

The coming of "Ram rajya"

The setting up of the ministry under G.B. Pant in 1946 marked a new phase; the feeling of *swaraj* had created confidence and widespread euphoria. It also led to re-valuation and reconstruction in political behaviour in rural society: the kisans believed that their political expectations would to be fulfiled with the departure of British rule. They were prepared to retaliate against any injustice.

These acts of physical retaliation fuelled a change in the growth of popular consciousness which appeared to have broken free of deeply ingrained social constraints. It generated and negotiated a new sensibility that marked a sharp departure from the past. Instead of being on the defensive, the kisans were prepared to confront oppression, even individually if the need arose. To some of them, the support of a collective group, such as the kisan sabha, was not the only instrument of redress.[3] Many individual cases of the kisans "speaking their mind" illustrated the new spirit of retribution;[4] For instance, an unnamed Chamar of Changera estate appeared before the Raja Ashtbhuja and beat the ground three times to draw his attention and scolded him in public: "You have

[3]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 18 February 1992.
[4]*Idem.*

robbed us of our lands, our property even our religion, but now we won't put up with it any more. We prefer to die than to bear any more oppression."[5] He warned the spectators that he would kill anyone who stopped him from speaking; nobody touched him and let him go. He was arrested later. Another case was that of a kisan who had cut off the hand of a *patwari* in Dummariaganj *tahsil*. The kisan had been cultivating his ancestrally held land which the *patwari* had threatened to write down as the zamindar's *sir* unless he paid him an extra-legal charge. The kisan had been forced to sell his cows, ox and buffalo to pay the *patwari* the demanded sum. The *patwari* took his money but changed the records in favour of the zamindar. Whereupon, the kisan invited the *patwari* for a meal and told him, "We work hard on this land and you write the land in the name of the zamindar. Its not your fault but that of your hand". He took a *gadasa* (axe) and chopped off the *patwari*'s hand.[6]

Although such acts marked a distinct departure from the past, it is difficult to draw boundaries between pre-Independence and post-1947 movements with respect to popular politics which continued to transgress official codes and remained independent of *élite* initiatives. It is commonly agreed that the bourgeois nationalism of the Congress "high command" was sharply opposed to accommodating the demands of a landless peasantry. The kisans could hardly hope for any promise of change because the political alignments within the Congress continued to follow the patterns set up during the late 1930s.[7] For instance, frictions and tensions caused by the repeated stalling of the Zamindari Abolition Bill (not to mention its terms and conditions), combined with the severe shortage

[5] *Aaj*, 30 May 1947.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Sumit Sarkar, , Modern India: 1885–1947, (Delhi, 1983), pp. 338, 380–81.

of food grains, once again led to movements among the kisans in rural society against the Congress and against zamindari *julum*. Popular understanding of *swaraj* remained diametrically opposite to that of the Congress: the kisans could not identify with bourgeios nationalism and did not espouse it either.

What happened immediately after independence in August 1947? There was great rejoicing in many villages; the old and the young (who had participated in 1942) installed Gandhi's bust on *chabbutras* (dias), hoisted the tricolour flag and made pledges to be honest and serve the nation.[8] However this merriment was to be shortlived—for the kisan, the administrative and legal structure largely remained unchanged; the ordinary villager could not as yet experience any clear break with the past. There were to be more patterns of continuity than of change.

Arvind Das notes that in Bihar, although the Congress won the elections in 1946 on the basis of the zamindari abolition manifesto, it did little to prevent the physical attacks on the kisans by the zamindars.[9] The evidence for U.P. substantiates this point. There were innumerable instances of physical brutality by zamindars on kisans which continued to happen everywhere. It was the lower-castes who experienced the greatest suffering. Johku Chamar's sixty-year old father was hung upside down and beaten on his genitals by the *sipahis* (armed police) because he had been overheard abusing zamindari.[10] Lallo Harijan filed a complaint in Captainganj, Deoria at the office of the Socialist party. He said the zamindar had beaten his entire family and his father was fighting for his life in Sadr hospital and the police had refused to file this complaint.[11] In Jasni village,

[8]Interview with Dwivedi, Gorakhpur city, 4 January 1992.

[9]Arvind N. Das, "Agrarian change from above and below: Bihar 1947–1978" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, II, (Delhi, 1983), p. 184.

[10]Interview with Jokhu Chamar, Amila village, Azamgarh, 14 September 1991.

[11]*Aaj*, 3 May 1951.

the police put *lathis* through the anii of some kisans and humiliated the women.[12] These traumatic experiences were perpetrated by zamindari authorities.

It was the same "culture of terror" that the kisans had experienced under the *angreezi hukumat.* In fact, certain pockets in many areas acquired notoriety for these acts of *julum* and had a significant bearing on popular consciousness. For instance in Gobarbazar,on the Mehndawal-Uska border, the kisans were subjected to tortures by Sheikh Abdul Jawab (who had recently applied for a gun licence) The kisan *neta*, Prakash Chandra Pandey urged that the zamindar be refused permission for a gun license. They stated that in Pokhar village, Gulzari a widow was ill-treated.[13] The Sheikh ordered that "she be milked like a cow" and then she was gang-raped by the *lathaits* and her vagina was filled with red chillis. Two kisans who tried to stop the crime were nearly killed. The physical violation of lower-caste women's and men's bodies was a common recourse to crush any form of defiance. Elsewhere, in Pitni village, Ram Bali "was made a *murgah*" and ordered to abuse the villagers at night. Charan Harijan's wife was beaten badly and verbally abused. Mathura Teli of Gobharawa was also beaten and verbally abused and the guards were posted at night and the *goondas* were ordered to rape his wife while the other *goondas* insulted the kisans— such examples were numerous and no kisan dared to raise his or her voice against such tyranny.

Many kisans believed that as far as they were concerned, "*swaraj*" was not a "tryst with destiny" but a travesty of the truth: they had nothing to gain by it. The produce from the land was also seized from the kisans. For instance, in Purandharpur, the zamindar of Barhiyani village confiscated the carts loaded with rice, wheat and *dhan* to frustrate the kisans demand for the land. In Bhujhi

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Communist Pamphlet 1949 written by Prakash Chandra Pandey, Gandhi bazaar, Basti.

village, Azamgarh, a zamindar occupied the lands of two pot-makers because they refused to supply 2,000 *khapdias*(mud pots) Rs 1.[14] At a meeting, speeches were made against the *tahsildar* of Balrampur estate, and the station officer of Panchpir and the kisans threatened *satyagraha*.[15] About 400 men of a Gorakhpur zamindar in Rampur *tal* of Balua village looted the kisans and burned 200 huts; some were caught and charged under Section 397, 376, 436 and 324 of the penal code.[16]

The attitude of the authorities (from the Collector to the *daroga*) remained unchanged. Continued harassment by the police on various occasions was reported. For instance, at the fair in Sohnagpur-Salempur border in Barhalganj, all the kisans who entered the grounds were asked by the police to deposit their *lathis* under the promise of returning it. But the police confiscated the *lathis* and, when the kisans demanded its return they fired shots at them which resulted in four deaths and several kisans were injured in the scuffle.[17] To the kisans, there was little difference between the *angreezi hukumat* and Congress raj.

It was clear that with the acquisition of power, the new government was reluctant to take up cudgels against the zamindars or even redress *julum*: the tone was strictly one of compromise. It also became apparent that for the Congress (both in discursive or organisational terms) the ambitions and demands of the kisans were regarded as an erosion of the party's autonomy and threatened its political space. One instance of this was the administration's prevarications over the abolition of zamindari and the granting of *milkiyat rights* to the kisans. The ruling party appeared far more concerned to compensate the zamindars. These

[14] *Aaj*, 4 September 1947.
[15] PAI, 1948, p. 306.
[16] *Aaj*, 30 January 1953.
[17] *Aaj*, 23 April 1950.

reactions were to stimulate profound insights into the nature of the Congress politics in the locality. It had drawn upon existing social forms and belief patterns, and taken advantage of its political status as a symbolic focus of identification.

Thus from the early 1950s onwards, the popular image of the Congress government in the countryside during the post-Independence years was increasingly characterised by the politics of scapegoating and betrayal. Many kisan leaders believed that they had been deceived by "these radical imitators". They had been unable to free themselves from its dominant structure of discourse and their bargining power had been seriously weakened. Above all the integrity of the movements against *julum* had been seriously compromised. The zamindars were joining the Congress in droves, and some of them had even been offered electoral representation. This led to the growth of disillusionment and many *kartas*, such as Balbadrinath and Asharfi Lal, resigned from the party in Basti. They felt it was too bitter to digest: *"Karela neem par chad gayi"*.[18] They were ideologically closer to the left and began to work with these parties.[19] There was little or no redress to the crisis of hunger and *julum*. An old man's remark sums up the mood. He said it was better to die. He had asked his adolescent son to give up everything and participate in Gandhi's movement, thinking of the happy and prosperous days to come, but it was not long before he realised that misery was all they would ever experience under *swaraj*.[20] It did not take the kisans long to realise that their *swaraj* was still to come.

[18]Personal communication from Asharfi Lal, "The bitterness of the karela was added on to the bitterness of neem"

[19]Interview with Dwaraka Prasad, Bansi, 8 February 1992.

[20]*Aaj*, 23 April 1950.

Ridiculing the Congress

The enormous political weight generated by the kisans in the years before Independence went unrewarded by Congress policies; they were seen as an aberration in difficult times. For example, the Zamindari Abolition Bill was deliberately stalled despite the mounted pressure "from below" for its passage. The Congress was criticised for having lost cogency of behaviour and for the hollowness of its utterances, particularly in relation to its promise of zamindari abolition. From 1946 up to the 1950s, the delays in advancing the bill gave rise to enormous frustration and anger. One Gaderiya voiced a common sentiment—it was true that the Congress government and Nehru were on the *gaddi* (seat of power) but there was utter lawlessness and rampant goondaism. It was even feared by the *mukhia*, police and the *bania*. The villagers had been betrayed by the proverbial, wily fox (the Congressman) who carried tricolour flags, wore *khaddar*, Gandhi *topis* and preached *swaraaj baat*: they were responsible for the rise in hooliganism and corruption.[21] For example, in Uldan, the local Congressman was realising *panchata dand*, although there was no authorised panchayat in the villages. In Hata, a certain Nand Kishore Vaish was also reported to be realising similar penalties. Important leaders also voiced their concern about the shallowness of *swaraj*. For instance, in Dohrighat on 18 August 1948, Jai Bahadur Singh wrote an open letter on behalf of the Communist party, titled *"Communist party ki kulli chitti"*, to Lal Bahadur Sastri,the Minister for Agriculture in which he said the police and the zamindars were committing heinous crimes and tormenting the kisans. None of the kisans could enjoy the pleasures of freedom. To provide written proof of these complaints he named the individual zamindars and members of the police

[21] *Aaj*, 3 September 1947.

force.[22]

The authorities were regarded as the perpetrators of crime, corruption and theft. Often the victims were poor people who were unable to defend themselves. The attack was not restricted to the low castes. Communal violence began to infect the politics in the locality in a discernible way. Partition had created ripples and the villagers were now targets, and Hindu kisans were pitted against Muslim kisans; although the lower-caste kisans rarely professed communal sentiments, they were forced to confront such happenings.

There were numerous instances of communal tension and it was usually incited by local magnates. For example, in Mehndawal, Maghar, it was reported that 100 weavers had migrated to Pakistan because they had been severely harassed by the Ram Murthy Singh, the circle inspector and asked to grow a *chhoti* (pig tail).[23] In another incident, on 19 August 1954, forty Muslims of Kasbah *ilaqa* in Shorhatgarh complained that Ramanand Rai, a circle inspector with the help of local hooligans and policemen rounded up twenty-eight men who were praying and looted the mosque. They took Rs 500 in cash, two bags of rice, 300 prayer carpets and tore a few pages from the Quran. The following day some hooligans entered the mosque wearing footwear and used it as a toilet. Similarly the tailor shops (mostly owned by the Muslim Julahas) in Hakim pargana had been forcibly removed from the market. Such acts were condemned by the Communists who had organised a successful agitation in Shorhatgarh against the two principal zamindars, the Raja and the Sheikh of Chetra who were regarded as evil by all the kisans.

The police were also blamed for organising armed robberies because they could

[22]PAI, 1948, p. 44.
[23]Appendix IV.

no longer get bribes from the people.[24] There was general disenchantment and many individuals rallied together to counter the authority of the government. In Deoria, a "Jan Congress" was formed to counter the injustice of the Congress which had arbitarily sanctioned the digging of a nine-mile canal on land belonging to impoverished kisans.[25] The people's Congress declared that it had come into existence because the Congress had burnt its credentials and nullified the achievement of the past sixty years.

The political alignments in Lucknow had distinct reverberations in the district headquarters, but in most of the *mandals* there had been little hesitation in choosing between the opposing strands of the doctrine. It is interesting to examine the independent nature of dissent from the *mandals*. At the grassroot level, from the early 1950s, the criticism of the Congress was expressed by a vote of no-confidence; there was growing opposition to the policies of the party. The MCCs in Mau, Raunabazar, Dohrighat and Chilhia passed resolutions against certain policies of the Congress, in particular zamindari compensation was vetoed. In Deoria, the workers of the Dudhai Congress *mandal* replaced the Congress flag with the Socialist flag; in Gorakhpur, the DCC declared that there were two kinds of Congress, the first had the support of the police and the courts and consisted of blackmarketeers, the second consisted of dedicated *kartas*.[26] They began resigning in groups;[27] the first resignations numbered 202 in Bansgaon, 300 in Maharajganj, 251 in Pharenda. There were over 2,000 *kartas* who had formally resigned in these districts, unhappy with bleak promises, increasing goondaism

[24] *Aaj*, 7 February 1955.
[25] *Aaj*, 10 April 1951.
[26] *Aaj*, 26 April 1951.
[27] *Aaj*, 19 May 1951.

and shortage of essential goods.[28] So it was not surprising that village panchayats in eastern U.P. were affected by these developments. For instance, in Sultanpur four out of the six *sarpanches* were Communists and in Ballia out of the 1600 candidates from 150 villages representing 40 gram panchayats, 1500 seats were won by the Communists.[29] It was a commonplace saying that the fruit of freedom was too bitter to digest or that too much had been sacrificed and it had been a series of futile struggles. The popular verdict was be summed up by the following verse:

> Galli galli ka nara hai, sarkar ko ek aur dakkha do, Pant ney wade toota hai, Congress sarkar jhooti hai.[30]

The new order of anti-Congress politics was born out of other painfully acquired certainities; this degree of political experience did not come cheaply. Official disregard of widespread human suffering illustrated how the Congress raj was in no way better than the *angreezi sarkar*. There were fundamental problems that weighed upon the kisans which had an important bearing on popular pragmatism—the most significant being the crisis of hunger.

The problems of low-caste oppression, shortage of food, cloth and essential commodities continued well into the 1950s. Further, the administration had displayed great insensitivity to the plight of the kisans, its new slogan being *"adhik aann upjawo"* ("grow more crops"). How could the kisans grow food when most of the lands had been declared *kurki* (to be auctioned) and Section 145 IPC had been imposed on them? There were countless incidents of kisans

[28]Personal communication from Balbadranath.

[29]*Aaj*, 11 April 1949.

[30]*Ibid.*, "In every street there is the utterance that Pant has broken his promises and the Congress government is dishonest."

having sold or mortgaged all their possesions to buy food and being left with nothing. For instance, in Neura, Natwas, Chetra and Shorhatgarh, the kisans were forced to feed on the bark, roots and leaves of trees.[31] A common sentiment was expressed thus: *"Hame lapsi pakawe ke kadai nahi ba, hamke bhuiyon soye ke chattai nahi ba"*.[32]

Since the war there had been non-availability of food grains and a serious shortage of essential goods like salt, clothes and kerosene oil. The general condition in these districts was that there was no food (not even a handful of rice in the villages), and many were dying of starvation and poverty.[33] Ram Sundar Sastri, the President of a kisan sabha on a visit to Deoria found, from talking to the kisans, that families in 50 to 75 houses, consisting of 500 to 600 people, had died of starvation.[34] The *kharif* crops had been destroyed by the floods and people were dying of starvation: only five bags of gram seeds were sent for the 40,000 affected. Death was so common that it practically went unrecorded and was unremarked upon. The situation worsened because of repeated crop failures and the onset of serious famine: kisans and their families were seen pulling out weeds and roots to feed themselves. The common complaint was that this enormity of human suffering was being deliberately overlooked by the authorities. In the *bangar*, there was fierce hunger compared to the *kacchar*, where prices were more affordable. This situation continued well into the 1950s. In one reported instance, Lalsa Kahar of Bishauli village wrote to the District Magistrate that his wife and three daughters were close to death.[35] Sachai Chamar of his village had

[31] *Aaj*, 28 April 1952.
[32] "We have no saucepan to cook food nor a mat to sleep on" suggesting that it was futile to possess such belongings anyway.
[33] *Aaj*, 3 September 1947.
[34] *Aaj*, 10 May 1947.
[35] *Aaj*, 24 April 1952.

committed suicide because for 88 days his entire family had been feeding on the *kopala* (roots) of the banyan tree and leaves of the *vahal.* Despite official reluctance to acknowledge the famine, it was impossible for them to prevent popular unrest which challenged the rough justice of Congress raj.

During the late 1940s and 1950s many movements once again took root to challenge Congress rule. Many people resigned from the Congress between 1947–50, and this affected the pace of popular politics Narendra Dev's resignation in 1948 along with many other important socialists led to the weakening of the Congress in U.P.: it called into question its legitimacy to govern India.[36] He urged the people to leave the Congress and vote for the Socialist party which would abolish zamindari in 24 hours. In Basti and Deoria, many the Socialists resigned from the Congress. There was a growing conflict within the DCCs about the political philosophy of the party. At a Socialist party meeting in Azamgarh, Satya Deo Sastri and Ramanand Mishra said the administration did not fulfil the need of the public and should cease to exist altogether. Further, they emphasised that the Socialist party had severed its connections with the Congress as the latter was following in the footsteps of the British and privileging the zamindars and capitalists; Lohia declared that over 100,000 kisans would march to Lucknow and demonstrate in front of the assembly: A popular slogan of the time was *"Bidhan Parishad dhokha hai Bhulo math Bhulo math"* ("The Legislative Assembly is a sham, do not forget, do not forget").[37] Their main demand was that the immediate abolition of zamindari or all kisans would court arrest, travel ticketless on trains. The modes of political action were distinctly Gandhian, although they now formed part of a socialist agenda.

[36]Interview with Paras Nath Mishra, Lucknow, 12 October 1991.
[37]*Aaj*, 23 August 1949.

The Socialist party took up the issues of land, hunger and the famine by invoking the spirit of non-cooperation in these districts.[38] Acharya Narendra Dev, the leader of the Socialist Party, in his critique, Hamne Congress kyon Choodey (Why we left the Congress), in May 1948, explained that the Congress had revoked its promises and it was vital to oppose the present government.[39] The authorities continued to espouse erstwhile colonial attitudes, favouring the landlords and the capitalists, even though there was so much starvation and poverty. He explained the differences between the Congress and the Samajwadi party. The kisans must recognise their enemies from their friends; the delaying tactics of the government with regard to zamindari abolition showed that it was not determined to support that plan; there were great inequalities between the rich and the poor, and the only remedy was to establish the *kisan-mazdoor* raj. The Congress was wrong to have accepted the partition of India against the wishes of Gandhi, hence the Socialists had to sever connections with it as it had fallen away from its past ideology.[40]

Pandey's observation on the 1940s about the politics in eastern U.P. and Bihar sums up the main ideological trends prevalent during the 1950s. He notes that there was "a long and serious contention" between the spirit of violence and the ideology of non-violence, between those (such as the Communists and the RSP) who advocated the seizure of power by violence and those (such as the Socialists) who still kept faith in *satyagraha.*[41] For example, the Socialists hoped to achieve their aims through techniques of non-cooperation and Gandhian *satyagraha.* This presented a coherence and continuity with the fundamental

[38]Interview with Paras Nath Mishra, Lucknow, 12 October 1991.
[39]PAI, 1948, p. 97.
[40]Interview with Paras Nath Mishra, Lucknow, 12 October 1991.
[41]Gyanendra Pandey (ed.),The Indian Nation in 1942 (Calcutta, 1988), Introduction, p. 12.

forms of the political struggles of the past, traditions that to them had become legitimate means of seeking redress. The rural branch of the party, the Kisan Shoshit Sangh's activities, took on the garb of the Non-Cooperation Movement. For instance, at a meeting in Jasaya village, Ghalibpur, Azamgarh, the *netas* said that police and *patwaris* were superflous and village disputes must be settled by their own village *panchayat.* The *patwaris* should work to protect the kisans' rights. The general warning was "Congress bhakton se sawadhan raho" ("Be wary of devotees of the Congress"). In several villages in Azamgarh, labourers stopped work and high-caste landowners were forced to plough the land. Similarly in Basti, field labourers struck work and demanded an increase in wages.[42]

In contrast to the Socialists, the Communists and the Revolutionary Socialists openly preached armed struggle and the seizing of weapons. The Communists encouraged kisan gatherings and explained the laws and preached self-defence, "Kaise loge malguzari, lathi hamara zindabad" ("How will you [the zamindar] collect rent? Long live the *lathi*".)[43] The Communists said it was imperative to overthrow the present government and establish *kisan-mazdoor* raj;[44] The seizing of power, even a *côup d état* was openly advocated. In Dohrighat, the kisan *netas* advised them to occupy the police station, courts and post offices at the opportune moment. A procession of armed men with *lathis* were taken out. Anti-Congress slogans such as "Police aur Patwari ko ek dakka do"; Hukumat par kabza karna hai, Bhulo math, Bhulo math" were frequently used.[45] They encouraged the unihibited use of violence against authority. The message was

[42]PAI, July 1948, p. 110.

[43]This was the famous *danda* cult of Sahajanand. Also cited in Arvind N. Das, Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar, 1900–1980 (Delhi, 1983), pp. 152–53, 159.

[44]*Aaj*, 7 June 1951.

[45]"Get rid of the police and the *patwari*", "We need to take over the government, do not forget that, do not forget that."

propagated through demonstrations and the use of loudspeakers—"Jiski lathi uski khet Zamindaron ka pet pharon".[46] Many radical pamphlets were circulated such as Poorvanchal ke zamin ke goondai ke viroodh main kisanon ka viraat pradarshan (A kisan demonstration against zamindari hooliganism in eastern U.P.). This pamplet warned the villagers that even if they were arrested, they should be prepared for the critical days ahead. Once again the feeling of hope was born with the left offensive on the government. Many kisans opined that the Communists took it upon themselves to organise them in these areas. Although they were "lynched, hunted down and tortured by the authorities for defending the kisans, and fighting to restore their dignity, they had not given up and they taught the kisans "to perceive their true enemies".[47] There were numerous small-scale movements happening in the villages with seemingly little assistance from outside. The momentum of those times prompted such acts, generating new *netas* and hope of a new beginning.

Communist ideology was also rapidly gaining ground among the kisans. Every Communist meeting preached revolution by force and introduced the subject by bringing up local matters for redress. For instance, in Hansapur village, Azamgarh, Jai Bahadur Singh asked the kisans not to subscribe to the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Fund. Instead they ought to take forcible possession of land by the sowing season even though "rivers of blood" would have to be shed to join the Communist Party. In response to a local complaint, Jai Bahadur Singh asserted that the partymen would beat 300 zamindars who had beaten three Chamars. There was a serious need to overthrow the present government by means of an armed rebellion. They would be trained to ward off a combined attack of police

[46] "Might is right", "Tear the zamindar's stomach"
[47] Interview with Jaggi, Chatera village, 6 February 1991.

and zamindars. The present government could not be overthrown by votes because the Congress would secure it by force. The only answer to its goondaism was the *lathi*. Kisans should take possesion of their own lands and those who interfered should be killed and buried there and then. At another sabha held on 7 June, Singh said the local Congress was a party of *goondas* which comprised of zamindars and capitalists.[48] The slogans were shouted "August ki azadi jhooti, tange ghulami thoor do, Union Jack Phaar do".[49] They wanted complete abolition of the old administrative practices under British rule which favoured the zamindari: all *élite* power structures had to be replaced by kisan raj. If the Congress would not end zamindari by June 1948, kisans would put an end to it themselves. The popular slogans were:

> Desh ki janta bhookhi hai, yeha azadi jooti hai.
>
> Zamin par kabza karna hai, jiski lathi uski khet.
>
> Roti, kapra, teil do, nahi to kursi choor do.[50]

("The people in the country are hungry, this freedom is false; we must seize the land; might is right; give us food, clothes and fuel, otherwise give up office.")

Another measure advocated by the Communists during the 1940s was to seize stocks of grain and cloth. In Azamgarh, the local Communists advised the forcible possession of land and the capture of stocks of grain and cloth. They abused the station officer of Raunapur for ill-treating the kisans. In Amila bazaar, they stated that wages of the kisan *harwahas* ought to be four *seers* of grain for ploughing two *bighas* of land. Other kinds of issues were taken up such as the increase

[48]PAI, 1948, p. 97.

[49]"The freedom won in August is false. Break loose of the slavishness, Tear up the Union Jack."

[50]PAI, 1948, p. 97.

in school fees which meant that children of the kisans would remain illiterate.

The RSPI was particularly influential in Azamgarh. Jai Bahadur Singh circulated many pamphlets urging the kisans to collect arms and ammunition by any means.[51] There were many sabhas held and speakers' addresses were peppered with slogans such as "Zamindarko muaza nahi dena, kamane wale khayega, poonji pati sarkar ko ek dakka do".[52] One speaker, Kamta Prasad, said that this sabha had been organised as a challenge to a zamindar and he spoke out against several prominent zamindars by naming them and announced that the party was preparing a programme to fight against "these blood suckers". Jharkande Rai said seven ministers of the present cabinet were old traitors and non Congressmen. He organised the kisans against the zamindars and assisted sweepers to agitate for wages and other facilities.

The government was blamed for encouraging communal violence. J. C Chatterji, the leader of the party condemned Partition for the communal disturbances and bloodshed. He had left the Congress because it was manned by traitors and black-marketeers. Freedom could only be achieved by a revolutionary movement, because the government would never eradicate zamindari. The kisans were advised not to be misguided by the false propaganda of the Congress.[53] It did not wish to educate the poor in case power should eventually pass into their hands. The demands of the kisans were to abolish zamindari without compensation. All evictions had to be stopped. There ought to be free distribution of arms to the kisans and mazdoors and those detained in Ghazipur and Azamgarh must be immediately released. It was declared that there should be no-rent demanded

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[52] "Do not pay the zamindar rent, the toiler alone shall eat, topple the capitalist government."
[53] PAI, 1948, p. 24.

from land under three acres.[54]

To end the growing procrastination over the Bill, deadlines were served on the Congress; June 1948 was declared as the time by which zamindari abolition would be achieved. Meanwhile the Socialists announced "Zamindari Abolition Day" . Over a thousand kisans turned up to Bishenpur, Deoria. The Hindi weekly *Lokmat* criticised the Congress for neglecting the interests of the poor masses and not checking the black-marketeers who were profiting from the sales. They were asked not to pay rent and take possesion of the fields because zamindari would be abolished.[55] Chatterji said that the capitalists had done nothing for the betterment of the kisans on whose votes they had been elected, and they had no intention of abolishing zamindari; many poor people had been tortured and sent to jail in such places as Ghazipur and Azamgarh. India would have benefited from an independence achieved by a revolution. He urged the kisans to join the *inquilab fauj* and unite under the *kisan-mazdoor* banner.

In the circumstances, the popular appeal of the Communists and other parties on the left had gained strength from the late 1940s. The oft-repeated slogan in every political rally was "Do not forget, Do not forget" the betrayal by the Congress. They did not want to succumb to any sort of compromise with the Congress ever again. To strengthen left unity, RSPI, had split under Jharkande Rai to form the Uttar Pradesh Revolutionary Socialist party which joined the Communist Party in 1953, and in the words of one member, "re-invigorated the party".[56] They declared that red was the colour of the flag and all kisans should wear red clothes and fight the Congress. It was widely denounced "for having

[54] *Aaj*, 17 May 1955.
[55] PAI, May 1948, p. 97.
[56] Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.

allied with the capitalists and the zamindars". In the villages, the Communists were active in educating the kisans and won their appreciation and loyalty. To cite one example, on 26 February, Sheo Prasad Pathak was arrested by the police. He had been working with the kisans near the villages under Barhave thana. The villagers surrounded it and beat up the constable and the chowkidar. The police observed that the entire village was "Communist minded" and most of "the Muslims of Deoria" were showing sympathy with the Communists.[57] The kisan sabha had resolved the following: wages would be increased from Rs 1 to Rs 4; the homes and self-cultivated land of the kisans should be considered their own; zamindari should be abolished at once—and failing that it should be done by force; all ejections should stop. The maximum area held by a zamindar should not be more than 25 acres and zamindari should be abolished without compensation.[58] In Bairari village, Deoria, Bhagwati Sastri stated that zamindari had not yet been abolished because Congress M.P.s and party workers favoured zamindari. He ridiculed Nehru and was arrested for circulating "objectionable literature" such as the pamphlet Nehru sarkar aur Communist andolan.[59]

It was a general consensus that the land problem necessitated immediate redress and stern measures against inequalities; it was a tough problem to solve, a *"shere samasia"* (lion problem), and many kisans believed that the Communists would solve it. The local Communist *netas* encouraged the kisans to confront the problems as actively as possible. For instance, there were strained feelings between the kisans and the owners of three private farms near Gorakhpur in Alidpur estate. The kisans were asked to forcibly occupy the land by their leaders.

[57]PAI, 1948, p. 34.
[58]PAI, 5 June 1948, p. 6.
[59]*Ibid.*, p. 224.

This was in contrast to the earlier Congress measures which had advised the laboures to obey the law as section 144 CPC was promulgated in the estate. The Communists impressed upon them that the land belonged to them and they should occupy it forcibly; the party enrolled one anna members and started a sabha. Later, the kisans broke the irrigation channels and diverted the water.[60] They were assisted by the Communist *netas*; on 21 May, the villagers gathered and contravened the orders of 144. They were assisted by prominent Communist *kartas* Chabbu Choudhary, Dwaraka Prasad, Ram Vilas Pandey, Navar Lotan, Dukhharan, Muhammed and Santoshi.[61] The *netas* had advised the kisans not to get arrested "like goats and sheep but to evade arrest in every possible way". Nine kisans were arrested and the villagers surrounded the police party and did not allow it to proceed. The police reinforcements rounded up 98 persons and later 64 were arrested, while those remaining were released, after giving an undertaking worded on the same lines used during the 1930s. Detention warrants were issued against six Communists who had organised the agitation, three of them were under arrest.

Meanwhile there was conscious intellectual reasoning at the public level to implement measures that would benefit the kisans with regard to their way of life. These were the apostles of Gandhi who dominated public life for many decades. There was protest against mechanisation in the countryside, and the opposition to it was supported by the kisans. Nehru had declared he supported big machines and favoured industrialisation. In another meeting, Dheerendra Mishra, a local leader said that thirty-three years ago, Gandhi had said that unless the *charkha*

[60]PAI, 1948, p. 85.
[61]Personal communication with Dwaraka Prasad

was present in every home, independence could not be achieved.[62] Further, he said that although they were free now, the freedom was false because of the shortage of food and cloth. Capital required the use of machinery which would make the kisans unemployed and lead to foreign interference. It was better to use the plough and time-tested tools that were manufactured locally such as the *hal, kudal dhekal* and *ghani.* They declared that the kisans should boycott mill products and buy products from the huts—*griha udyog* (cottage industries). With so many kisans dying of starvation, the Congress *sarkar* was criticised for promoting big machines and tractors.[63]

The mounting opposition to the government by various parties had led to several protest movements. Here are a few case studies of a few large movements by each party. The movements had strong local roots and dealt with other kinds of *sarkari julum*—the object was to dismiss the Congress and establish a socialist government.

In Azamgarh, Sagri and Ghosi *tahsils* witnessed several movements against zamindari *julum.* The kisan sabha was started in Surajpur in 1946.[64] Among the working members were some *Harijan kisans* such as Ram Dhobi, Dadhibal, Mathura, Sunder and Ramwa Bhar. Jai Bahadur Singh inspired the kisans by stopping the collection of illegal levies and preventing *bedakhli* of kisans working on land owned by his own family. The major offensive was launched against the Rasulpur estate. Over a thousand kisans harvested the crop in fifteen acres of land out marked by their *netas.* Zaminpur village was also occupied by the kisans. Thus, the entire Dohrighat area was under the influence

[62] *Aaj*, 3 January 1951.
[63] *Aaj*, 12 February 1951.
[64] Sarjoo Pandey, Jai Bahadur Singh, published by the Communist Party of India (Lucknow, 1972).

of the Communist kisan sabhas. These activities helped forge *sangathan* (united front), and a district Communist committee was formed with Moulvi Abdul Baki, Khairul Bashir and Istiaq Abdi taking up the cause of the Julahas, the Mallahs, and the Mehtars.

The influence of the kisan sabha remained very powerful in certain *tahsils* and "the zamindars lived in terror of their activities".[65] Death threats by notices had been issued in the names of important zamindars. Printed handbills were circulated naming all those who had been responsible for *julum*.[66] The activists of the kisan sabha read it out loud at the *rathri pathshalas*. Conferences were organised to discuss the land problem and zamindari abolition. One such conference of agricultural labourers was held on 25–26 January 1950 at Kundwa-Manikpur. Kisans came from all over Awadh to attend and there were trade union workers, too, such as Subhash Mukherji, a young student. Most of the Communist Party *netas* had gone underground to evade arrest. The PAC unit arrived and began to fire shots killing the student and seriously wounding a representative from Basti, and Sumbasa Devi, a prominent representative. The crowd was angered by this and turned on the police force which took fright and ran. The crowd followed the force for five furlongs. Many women attacked the police armed with bricks, stones and pebbles that they picked up from the ground along the way. Later a cremation ceremony was organised for those Communists who had been shot. More than 15,000 kisans attended the ceremony, and chanted *Khoon ka badla , khoon se lengey*.[67] A large paramilitary force turned up and arrested the important leaders. This incident had an important influence in imparting unity

[65]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Banaras, 8 September 1991.
[66]*Aaj*, 19 February 1950.
[67]"We will avenge these bloody murders with the blood of our enemies".

to the kisans and also strengthened the Communist Party's influence. among the kisans. It gave rise to serious debate within the Communist Party about what line of action to take. Was it to be terrorism or an open confrontation through armed struggle? Many who had supported the idea of a *hathiyar bandh sangharsh* (no weapons) now openly advocated armed violence in every possible way.[68]

In the more politicised *tahsils*, kisan participation brought matters to ahead. The fear of the kisan movements caused some zamindars to panic. It was reported that the zamindars were selling jungles and forests and hurriedly disposing their property in Gorakhpur.[69] But the land was not being bought by the kisans; a new class of rich peasants, mostly Kurmis and Koeris were emerging and would manifest a conflicting political agenda during the early 1960s. So the kisans were not just deprived of these lands, but had to deal with new landowners.

The *netas* in the kisan sabha did not operate only in their district but went to neighbouring areas and tried to coordinate the work. The government had strengthened its repressive machinery—"damanchak tez hua" ("official oppression intensified")—and it was unendurable, so much so that ordinary villagers took the law in their own hands. One Communist *neta* observed that there was no difference between the Communist Party hardliners and these kisans.[70] Often the kisans completely disregarded the party directives and zamindars were openly attacked and killed. Numerous incidents were reported all over, in particular in the *tahsils* of Ghosi (Azamgarh), Rasdih (Ballia), and Muhammadabad (Ghazipur). The kisans retaliated in self-defence and hence only certain zamindars were targets. For instance, in November 1950, a zamindar Ram Kumar

[68]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Banaras, 8 September 1991.
[69]UPRAR, 1950, p. 12.
[70]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.

Sinha of Chichor ordered the *lathaits* to attack and loot a Harijan *basti* near Kurrah village.[71] The *goondas* set fire to the homes, and threw a young girl into the fire. One of them lifted a new born baby from the arms of a Harijan woman and "kicked it on the ground like football." This enraged the kisans who were assisted by the Communist *kartas*. They avenged the murders by killing him and five of his family. Such acts were not rare and illustrate the autonomy and strength that popular politics imparted to individuals, and in turn how such individuals were able to define its distinctive chartacter.

The Zamindari Abolition Bill

Repeated delays in the enactment of the Zamindari Abolition Bill considerably diminished the political magnetism of the Congress. From 1946 up to its passage as law in 1950, the stalling of the bill eroded the appeal of the Congress party, accounting for the enormous success of the left, in particular, the Communists, thus strengthening their claims to office. The few loyal Congressmen were worried about the attitude of the party. For example in Basti as early as 1947, the DCC viewed the Communist influence as a growing danger to its power and authority. Asarfi Lal, a local Congressman from Basti in a letter to Nehru feared "the fortunes of the Congress would become grave".[72] More than 10,000 kisans in Bansi and Dummariaganj *tahsils* had been deprived of their land because the Congress would not take a serious attitude and had failed to introduce laws to give herditary tenure and prevent ejections. The kisans here had been increasingly attracted to the left-wing parties such as the Forward Bloc and the Communist

[71] *Idem.*
[72] AICC papers, File G-49, (1947–48), letter dated 16 May 1947. NMML.

Party.

In this region the Communists, the Samajwadi party, the RSPI and the Forward Bloc were the main parties working among the kisans to abolish zamindari. The RSPI proposed to organise a united kisan sabha in each district to openly discuss zamindari abolition and spell out the nature of reforms required. There was a feeling that the Congress was behaving like the British, for example a common sentiment was "Brittania ki tarah ham log ko chuus rahen hai aur jail mein band kar rahen hain". It was hunting down the Communists.[73] The Communist Party office had been set on fire;[74] and many Communists were lynched and tortured. Further, once again the kisans were warned that unless they ceased to be Communist sympathisers, they would be jailed.[75] But the kisans were undeterred wherever the kisan sangh had a well knit organisation.

There was a growing fear among the conservative elements in the DCC that the Communist movement would take over the region. The army, police and communications were still in Congress hands so it was virtually impossible to establish a *kisan-mazdoor* raj.[76] The leaders were hunted down and jailed for five years. The kisans were once again victims of repression and the agitations went under. But the administration was forced to pass the Zamindari Abolition Act within the following year. There could be no further delay as the pressure from below intensified. So the Bill was finally passed and declared law on 1 July 1950.

The Bill accepted that ten acres was the minimum for an economic holding, an opinion that was voiced as early as 1931 by the UPPCC report, Agrarian

[73] "It [Congress] was sucking our blood like the British and putting us in jail", interview with Pabbar Ram, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.
[74] PAI, 2 February 1948, p. 22.
[75] Interview with Vijaypal, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 6 February 1992.
[76] Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.

Distress in the United Provinces. Section 4 of the Act declared that" all estates in the U.P. shall rest in the state free of all encumberances". Section 6(c)(1) stated that" all rents , cesses, local rates and *sayar* which would be payable to an intermediary shall rest in and be payable to the state government". So there were to be no intermediaries between the state and the cultivators. Three permanent kinds of tenure were initially created —*Bhumidhari, Sirdari* and *Assami*; in 1952, another category *Adhivasi* was added.

The U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee estimated that in 1945–46 out of the total of 4,250,000 acres of *sir*, 933,000 that is 22% was let out and out of a total of 3,130,000 acres of *khudhkasht*, 202,000 that is 6.5% was let out—more *sir* than *khudkasht.*[77] 40% of the land was with hereditary tenants and 28% with occupancy tenants. These were the general estimates for U.P., but in the eastern districts, it was mostly non-occupancy tenants who cultivated the land as the zamindars had prevented them from acquiring any rights whatsoever over the land. In 1947 it was stated that there were 2,016,783 zamindars in U.P. who paid an aggregate revenue of Rs 6.81 crores as land revenue.[78] Nearly 85% were pattidars, paying land revenue of 25%. Some 98.5% paid a land revenue of Rs 250 or less and owned only 40% of the land whilst 1.5% owned 60% of the land. The plan did not envisage land redistribution. Subsequent legislation ruled that the results achieved by redistribution of land would not be commensurate with the discontent and hardships from it. It did not affect the status of *sir* and *khudkasht* land which was cultivated by the tenants and sub-tenants, but allowed it to remain with the zamindar. That is why the agitation for land continued through the 1950s.

[77]Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition Committee Report, I, (Lucknow, 1950), p. 174.
[78]Communist Party pamphlet, Notes to Zamindari Abolition ,(Lucknow, 1951), p. 9.

It was an undisputed conviction that the ministry was supporting the zamindars. In 1949, G.B. Pant made an eager assurance to the zamindars that "the Bill was not influenced by any sense of revenge".[79] Further, he told them that said that no self-respecting kisan would like to receive free land. The kisans who deposited ten times the rent would get a 50% reduction from their present rent. The Congress committees were to play an active role in the publicity of the Zamindari Abolition Bill to be enforced on 17 August.[80] The *khataunis* of the crops of 1355 *fasli* and 1356 *fasli* were deposited in the *tahsil* offices of the *patwaris*, the correction of the *indrajas* of the *khataunis* would be done by 3 September and the receipts prepared by 20 September, so it should reach the kisans ten days later. The kisans could pay ten times revenue to acquire *sirdari* status from 2 October.

The principal Bill was delayed several times before being passed on 1 July 1952.[81] Whitcombe has pointed out that "the dilatoriness on the part of the legislators" gave the zamindars plenty of time to make multiple registrations of their property in the names of children, family members and even elephants.[82] Government made ex-zamindari, both viable and lucrative in practice: although the structure of land-holdings remained one-tenth zamindari, they still enjoyed ten times the income. The capital intensive agriculture strategy through fertilisers, tractors and their control over stotres, groves, pons, fairs and bazaars allowed them to retain their spatial network of power. Compensation also served to assist

[79] *Aaj*, 12 June 1949.
[80] *Aaj*, 12 August 1949.
[81] Baljit Singh and Sridhar Mishra, A Study of Land Reforms in Uttar Pradesh, (Calcutta, 1964) have pointed out how it was withheld in 1952, 1954 and 1956 for further ammendments to it, so that it was finally passed on November 1959.
[82] Elizabeth Whitcombe, "Whatever happened to the zamindars" in Eric Hobsbawm et al (eds.) Peasants in History: Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner, (Calcutta, 1980), pp. 156–79.

them economically.

In other words, the hopes and aspirations of the kisans were once again crushed. It was widely accepted that the Congress had burnt its credentials and deliberately turned against the kisans. The promise of compensation to the "middlemen", paid by the money the kisans deposited, appeared to be an integral condition of the Bill. There was a huge political outcry against it. For instance, the Communists vehemently opposed compensation: "Muawza mangney wale dhurth hain, aur muawza dene wale murkh hain".[83] In Azamgarh they proposed that zamindars should not be paid anything as they had amassed enough fortunes—the lands of the big zamindars ought to be seized forthwith and distributed among the 3,500,000 landless labourers. They actively preached that land belonged to the tiller and all cultivators should exercise this right. For example, 400 Communist kisans and mazdoors occupied 1800 *bighas* of land belonging to the Jubilee firm and hoisted the red flag to prevent the zamindars from controlling the land.[84] Numerous instances of resistance were reported in many places.

Widepread criticism of the government over the issue of compensation to the zamindars led to counter arguments. Many questions followed: How could the kisans be expected to pay ten times existing rent? The government said that it required Rs 140,000,000 for compensating the zamindars.[85] Why should the kisans account for the burden of Rs 1,400,000,000? It was the kisans land anyway so why should they pay compensation and also pay ten times revenue.?[86]

[83] "Those who ask for compensation are cunning and those who pay it are fools", *Aaj*, 13 July 1949.
[84] *Aaj*, 10 May 1948.
[85] *Aaj*, 8 May 1953.
[86] *Aaj*, 2 October 1949.

They stressed that zamindars should not be paid anything as they had amassed enough fortunes—the lands of the big zamindars ought to be seized forthwith and distributed among the 3,500,000 landless labourers. So the big question remained—why compensation? What was particularly galling to the kisans was that some zamindars had even proposed that they would assist the government in collecting money for compensation from the kisans. Further, there was no attempt to include any form of renumeration to the majority of starving *khetihar-mazdoors* (landless labourers).

To make matters worse, the government had set deadlines for dates by which *bhoomidhari* status could be acquired, hoping to acquire vast sums of money overnight.[87] By one such deadline, the authorities had expected to earn Rs 500,000 by October 1949 and Rs 250,000 by December. These deadlines were unworkable and only served to pauperise the kisans. Only a section of rural society could afford to pay cash sums and they were not in need of land anyway. But the problem of land hunger was so acute that many kisans tried to fulfil the regulations. They were forced to seek all kinds of credit to acquire these rights, although it was an unrealisable fantasy. In Ghazipur, it was reported that by 10 October 1949, the kisans had deposited more than Rs. 50,000. Often this led to an increase in petty quarrels amongst themselves and there was great tension in the countryside.

There were many frustrations and the lower-castes, once again, suffered the most; cases were reported where tens of thousands of kisans were being dispossesed of their lands. One Harijan was killed over a dispute for a *bigha* of land—this was not an uncommon occurrence.[88] Another deadline for depositing

[87]Interview with Prakash Chandra Pandey, Basti, 24 December 1991.
[88]*Aaj*, 5 July 1955.

money for *bhoomidhari* rights was set as 28 February 1950, but it was extended for another six months. The amount of money deposited was Rs. 15,161,151 by 17 February, but only 1,577,640 kisans were declared eligible.[89] In the end, the U.P. government could only collect Rs. 303,500,000 out of the estimate of Rs. 1,400,000,000.[90] This in itself was widely regarded "as orchestrated evil looting by the government which had set out to bleed the poor kisans".[91]

The Socialists argued that speeches and publicity could not conceal the inherent evils of the Zamindari Abolition Bill—all official publicity towards abolishing zamindari had been mere window dressing. For instance, at a sabha in Pharenda *tahsil*, R.M. Lohia said that the kisan should be allowed to pay rent directly to the state and not to the zamindar; the laws formulated by the Congress still required the kisans to pay ten times rent; it meant that the Congress expected the kisans to pay for abolishing zamindari, and those who had done so had become utterly pauperised because of the loans. The verdict was that the bill belonged to the zamindar and not the kisan.

Within three years of *swaraj*, it was publicly acknowledged that the Congress had lost the confidence and trust of the kisans to whom it was a *dhoke ki tutti* (dung of treachery).[92] This was a political debacle—the denial to grant the kisans "a speaking voice" and a political space fuelled considerable resentment. It led to the resurrection of movements against *julum* suggesting the need for an immediate alternative. The demand for a new government that would replace the Congress had taken root. The message was that the country was more important than the Congress; the party had proven to be a "dung of treachery" by siding with the

[89] *Aaj*, 1 March 1950.
[90] *Aaj*, 8 May 1953.
[91] Interview with Thakur Singhasan Singh, Gorakhpur city, 1 May 1992.
[92] *Aaj*, 1 October 1951.

capitalists and the zamindars.[93]

The "Nehru sarkar" was also blamed for Partition and the carnage of communal violence—the *goonda sarkar* had to be overthrown and a *kisan-mazdoor* raj established. There were criticisms levelled against Nehru who was declared a hypocrite. They asked: Had he not stated in 1939 that once Independence was achieved India would sever all connections with the British?[94] In Deoria, Brij Narain Tewari said that India was not the property of Pandit Nehru or his father, but belonged to the public.[95] The public should not vote for the Congress because it would amount to voting for the enemy. Nehru, Patel and Pant were accused of mishandling the government, bribery and corruption; the British had handed over power to dacoits and traitors. Nehru and the central administration was a burden on the tax payer—the Nehru government was a puppet of the British. The Union Jack was still flying on public buildings after *azadi* (Independence) had been achieved. Nehru's government was compared to Hitler's Nazi state and Chiang Kai-shek's rule:"Na rahi Chiang Kai shahi, Na rahe Nehru shahi, Pant shahi murdabad !"[96] If such actions continued, then Nehru would have to relinquish office. Another widely advocated sentiment was that Nehru ought to be replaced by a kisan.

It was also inevitable that kisan sabha *netas* would allude to, and manipulate the popular appeal of Gandhi: it was stated in sabhas that he was an advocate of a *kisan-mazdoor* raj, and he had desired that a a member of the kisan party should be made the Prime Minister instead of Nehru. Thus anti-Congress feelings

[93]Interview with Pabbar Ram, Rauza village, Ghazipur, 29 September 1991.
[94]PAI, 9 July 1948, p. 113.
[95]*Aaj*, 3 September 1948.
[96]"There no longer shall be tyrannical rule such as Chiang Kai or Nehru, Death to Pant's tyranny!", *Aaj*, 30 May 1948.

were openly voiced by the all parties on the left. The aim of the left-wing parties was to hoist the red flag at the Red Fort in Delhi—which meant the take over of the government. The tempo of political activity in the villages had to be kept up. The pre-swaraj maladies still existed and the kisans were bewildered by them. They had experienced the true nature and significance of the Congress-in-power. Despite the fact that there was so much suffering on account of the scarcity of food, essential goods and natural calamities, the Congress was unwilling to expedite zamindari abolition. The various parties of the left maintained that the struggle was not over—until a *kisan-mazdoor* raj was in power. It was necessary to keep hope alive for the kisans: each party acknowledged the futility of the present raj; they simply had to explore these disappointments to enable the kisans to go forward. But it was not just the time for philosophical reflections or provocative analysis of the past—a strategy for immediate seizure of power was imperative.[97] It was a time to propagate their political demands and ambitions. It is a testimony to the ideological appeal of the left that during the mid 1950s, many kisan sabha leaders who had not been allowed to contest the elections would enter the assembly and parliament.[98]

The challenge by the Left

From the 1950s, the The Socialist *satyagraha* focused on the government's callous indifference and refusal to recognise the famine in Deoria, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur which had been very severe.[99] In eastern U.P. there were 17,000

[97]Interviews with Pabbar Ram, 8 September 1991, Prakash Chandra Pandey, 24 December 1991.

[98]Interview with Guru Prasad, Lucknow, 2 October 1991.

[99]*Aaj*, 6 February 1951.

villages and 3,200,000 kisans were experiencing this crisis.[100] Many large kisan demonstrations were organised by the party.[101] They demanded Azamgarh district be declared as famine affected. The rabi and kharif crops had been destroyed by heavy rainfall. It asked for exemption of panchayati and other taxes and an end to the harassment of the police and the courts. It had been reported as the worst famine in thirty years with over 200,000 acres of parched fields.[102]

Rajaram Sastri of the Samajwadi party said that food crops had been destroyed in the floods in 1950, and since then the *sarkar* had not provided relief. On 9 January, Pant had said that according to the collector's report no-one had died and if some kisan had died he would have visited the districts. But Sastri said that he received a petition of two pages with over fifty thumb prints which said that the kisans could manage half a stomach full of food for four or five days to keep alive but not longer. The entry in the ration cards which were shown to him were dated January 1951, while the previous entry was sometime in 1949. So these kisans had been denied relief throughout 1950. The widow of Sukhdev, a kisan, said her husband had died after nine days of starvation. She had filed a report, but such reports were thrown on to the waste-heap by the authorities.[103] It was unfortunate that the District Magistrate was refuting the statement of the deaths and official records were hiding the truth. Elsewhere the *tahsildar* threatened the *mukhia* and the *chowkidar* for giving Shibbanlal Saxena the information of the 24 deaths in Deoria, including Karmaiti Dhobin of Khamraj Maharaj village.[104]

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[100] *Aaj*, 27 February 1951.
[101] *Aaj*, 7 May 1952.
[102] *Aaj*, 11 August 1952.
[103] *Ibid.*
[104] *Aaj*, 31 July 1952.

These forms of protest generated new forms of self-expression such as *ghera dalo* (throw a net), suggesting that people should capture the government. The purpose was to dismiss the Congress government on corruption charges and dereliction of duty; the Congressmen were said to be were ten times more corrupt than the government officials.[105] Many *satyagrahis* were arrested in the "ghera dalo" movement.[106] It was a very large rally; women and children participated in large numbers. Even a child of ten was prepared to go to jail. In Salempur there were a significant number of women *satyagrahis.* These were peaceful demonstrations but became violent with time. These movements had many dimensions. The *tala todo* movement and the *wasoli roko* movement of which it was reported that 65 Communist *satyagrahis* were arrested. Like the British, the Congress administration made no ideological distinctions between the Communists and the Socialists: all dissent was sedition and had to be put out by lengthy jail sentences. There was no question of redress or legitimacy of their protest. Many kisan leaders such as Sheetal Tripathi and Pabbar Ram noted that they had served longer jail sentences in Independent India as compared to British India. Now that the English had gone the Congress had no one to blame but itself. However, it was passing unjust laws and imprisoning conscientious citizens to cover up its shortcomings.

> Kala kanoon tor do, Netaon ko riha karo Jail ke pathak tutengey,
> hamara neta chhutenge

("Get rid of these unjust laws and release our leaders; we will break the gates of the jail and free our leaders")

In Bansi *tahsil*, another movement was organised under the leadership of

[105] *Aaj*, 23 June 1959.
[106] *Aaj*, 11 August 1958.

Ram Muhammad Singh and the Forward Bloc. The "Arrah thesis" of the Uttar Pradesh Kisan Sabha of 1949 stated that, "the object and task of the kisan sabha was to secure the ultimate economic and political powers to the producing masses through their active participation and leadership in the struggle to establish kisan-mazdoor panchayati raj".[107] The symbol of the party was the red flag with a springing tiger. In Khoya *mauza*, Dhawai village, the party office was established. There were membership forms, *ghoshana patras,* and regular party meetings; the problems of the kisans were addressed and a plan of action drawn up. Such was the case in Bansi *tahsil*: the zamindars of Bhanpur *mauza*, Lakhan singh and Chandan Singh, threatened the kisans and beat them if they refused *hari, begari*; they prevented the kisans from their rightful claim to the lands. So the kisans had to pledge unity and work against this tyranny by joining the Forward Bloc. The pledge ran thus:

> I will follow the teachings, and contribute to the activities of the Forward Bloc, and I request you to make me a member of this august party.
>
> I promise to spend all or part of my time in carrying out the teachings of the Forward Bloc with dedication.
>
> I volunteer to follow, wholeheartedly, the discipline of the party and I promise to keep secret all the plans the party executes from time to time.[108]

Ram Mohammed Singh continued his agitation and declared that unless kisan grievances were directly accounted for, his party would take action on 7 November

[107]Document given by Ram Muhammed Singh to the author.
[108]*Ibid.*

1948.[109] On 8 March in Karmaihia village he began a hunger strike in a temple. A large crowd of kisans gathered and Section 144 CPC was imposed. He was arrested in June 1949. The party's slogans were similar to those used by other left wing parties. For instance:

Bhulo math Bhulo math

Kangres Pant ho hoshiar

Forward Bloc hai taiyar

Yeh azadi jhoothi hai

Bhulo math , Bhulo math

Hamko roti kapra do, nahi to kurssi choor do,

roti kapra teil do nahi to kurssi choor do.[110]

("Do not forget, do not forget, the deviousness of the Congress and Pant, The Forward Bloc is ready, This freedom is false, Do not forget, do not forget; Give us bread, clothes, fuel, otherwise give up your office.")

In addition to zamindari *julum*, the movement addressed itself to the cutting of trees and clearing of forests.[111] The forests which were being cleared were Duhiyahave ghat, south of Tenra village, Nakahia ghat and Itahia, Kulhiye , south of Asahave village, Anikhata and Chahamarahia (purchased and about to be cut), Rana Lakana P.S., Medarahave (Karmaihia village), and Cooke grant near P.S. Chaapre. He called these contractors *chhors* and *dakus* and stated that the kisans had a right to prevent deforestation; unfortunately many zamindars

[109]PAI, 1 October 1948, p. 180.
[110]PAI, 1949, p. 105.
[111]Evidence from Sessions Trial 51 of 1953, Basti Sessions court, Ram Muhammed Singh's letter to K.M. Munshi dated 25 January 1951.

were actively assisting these *thekedars* and if a kisan raised his voice against this outrage, he would be charged with theft, dacoity, arson and murder. To add to all these troubles, many trees were being cut, and the crops were being wrecked by the *nilgai* and other animals of the forests.[112]

From this *ilaqa*, the movement spread in the villages around Sonhan, particularly in Dhawai, Piprahia and Karmaihia. The thana reports suggest that the zamindars felt threatened by the kisans. On 24 February 1951, Ram Muhammed filed a report in the thana naming all the principal zamindars Ram Prasad Singh, Raghunath Singh, Jagdambika Singh, Jhinguri Singh, Drupchand, Chandan Singh etc. Four days later, the zamindar brothers Lakhan and Chandan Singh were attacked by the kisans when they arrived at the village armed and riding on an elephant.[113] Ram Muhammed and thirty-eight others were charged with their murder and four of them were sentenced to death by hanging.[114]

From the list of kisans arrested for murdering the zamindars, it is interesting to note that most of them were from the lower-castes: Chamars, Telis, Ahirs, Bhars. Barhais, Kachhar, Baris and Kurmis.[115] There were a few listed as belonging to the Rajput and Brahmin castes, but they enjoyed no extra privileges. This was a multi-caste movement operating on extremely radical lines. Lower-caste kisans held important posts. They articulated a distinct class consciousness. Despite zamindari attempts to bring in divisiveness on issues of religion and caste the kisans remained united.

Another movement by the Praja Socialist Party protested against the widespread hunger. They held a rally on May day and 5,000 kisans holding 1,500

[112] *Aaj*, 20 January 1953.
[113] Evidence from Sessions Trial 52 of 1953, District court, Basti.
[114] Appendix II
[115] Appendix IV

flags with images of the wheel and the plough handed a notice to the District Magistrate. The speaker Vishwanath Pandey said that the hungry people would not keep quiet; property and land had to be distributed.[116] The power to stand up before authority and protest was a legacy of these times, particularly in the case of the lower-castes: A hundred kisan Harijans of Majhgaon demonstrated in front of the District Magistrate of Gorakhpur who had ill-treated the daughter of one of the kisans.[117] In the Samajwadi movement in Gorakhpur, 90 arrests were made in June alone.[118]

There were many conflicts between the Congress and the Communists which were constantly recurring over the kisan-mazdoor question. It was a tussle for power.[119] The district Communist Party in Basti was censured by the Congress. Elsewhere, a *lathi* charge was ordered against Socialist workers in Gorakhpur jail who revolted against the unsanitary conditions and rotten food and the fact that their relatives were not allowed to meet them.[120]

The pressure on the government was kept up mainly by the left wing parties such as the KMPP, the Socialists and the Communists. The Congress reacted making mass arrests and pronouncing long jail sentences on important leaders. For example, all Communist leaders in Deoria were arrested on 5 June 1957 for planning a *satyagraha*. This affected the movements in Deoria, Lar, Salempur, Khunkudu.[121] Instead of distributimg food and improving the conditions, the Congress accused the parties such as the Communists of planning a dacoity in the name of *satyagraha* by raiding the godowns. One of the striking weaknesses

[116] *Aaj*, 3 May 1954.
[117] *Aaj*, 17 June 1956.
[118] *Aaj*, 22 June 1960.
[119] Appendix IV.
[120] *Aaj*, 9 August 1957.
[121] *Aaj*, 5 June 1957.

and political immaturity of left-wing opposition was that they never tried to form a united opposition. Loyalities for each party were based on the nature of local leadership and local branches of various parties sometimes tried to co-ordinate protest. For instance, on 10 July 1957, the RSPI had started a movement against increasing prices and corruption of the government. A week later the Praja Samajwadi party started another *satyagraha.*[122]

Further with the rapid clearance of forests the impact of natural calamities became worse. For example, 1,200,000 acres of land were reported to be under flood water in Gorakhpur.[123] The most damaged *tahsils* were Sadr and Pharenda. In Naugarh, three quarters of the land was covered in water, and the inhabitants said that the flood water had reached such places which it could never had reached before. The surface level of the Rapti was 248.7 feet and rising. The same conditions were reported from Deoria. Nearly all the dams had collapsed, and the previous owners sold the land near the dams; an unfortunate result of zamindari abolition had been the damage to the eco-system. The zamindars kept their cultivated land and preferred to sell their forests.

The great consternation and anger remained because the government continued to do very little to alleviate the suffering. In his letter to Sampurnanand, Gainda Singh, a leader of the KMPP warned that there would be a *satyagraha* on behalf of 20,000,000 (2 crores) hungry and naked villagers.[124] He said that 80% of the *patwari* papers were incorrect and the *lekhpals* were just as bad as their predecessors. Also 75% of the rabi crop was damaged and there were thousands of unrecorded deaths due to starvation. The government by deliberate use of

[122] *Aaj*, 10 July 1957.
[123] *Aaj*, 9 September 1960.
[124] *Ibid.*, 27 August 1957.

deceit blamed these deaths on disease, although they knew that there was an acute shortage of food and grain. The protesters walked through the villages and many people joined the hunger march. Many were arrested and given three-month prison sentences. The *satyagrahis* demanded the release of all leaders and workers and exemption of all extra taxes against the kisans.[125] It was impossible for the Congress to remain indifferent or attempt to stem the tide of rural protest by empty promises. There were so many movements that the administration was forced to implement zamindari abolition and set up centres to assist the kisans.

In terms of popular politics, nothing concrete had been achieved so far in material terms for the kisans. A new plan was set up to quicken land reform called *Chakbandi* (consolidation of holdings): land re-distribution was being effected by *Chaks* (a holding). However, even this was to fail because the continual presence of middlemen, corruption, and consequently escalating costs of implementing it, merely worsened the kisans' position: to them it appeared as a self-defeating exercise, another debacle of the U.P. kisan sabha.[126] For instance, it was reported in Azamgarh that the entire land reform scheme for 131 villages in Sadr *tahsil* cost Rs 573, 808 per annum.[127] The kisans complained that two years had gone by and cost them Rs 1,157,616 during which all that the *tahsil* administration had done was to collect taxes in the name of *chakbandi*. This was a common complaint by kisans in many *districts*: all had come to naught so far. The kisans were not going to give up so easily.

But the Congress was rapidly losing its popular appeal. A sizeable number of

[125] *Aaj*, 28 October 1958.
[126] Critique by Guru Prasad, Uttar Pradesh Kisan Sabha ke Nawin Varshak Adhiveshan Mein Prasthut Sankship Report (Lucknow, 1955), p. 20.
[127] *Aaj*, 11 July 1957.

Socialists had been voted into the Assembly by popular support.[128] During the 1957 elections twenty-five Socialists (mostly from Deoria) stood independently for the Assembly elections and won by wide margins. Brass has noted that there was a continuous and steady decline in Congress votes in forty-four districts of U.P. from 1952 to 1957 and from 1957 to 1962.[129] In 1952, the Congress held 390 seats in the Assembly and the Socialists held 20 (the joint Socialist-KMPP vote). However, by 1962, the Congress commanded 249 seats while the divided left (Socialists, Communists and KMPP) won 76 seats.

The government was forced to fix boundaries (*hadbandi*) to define the land available for the kisans to get plots and to limit the zamindar's claims. One kisan activist, Vijaypal, noted that the spirit of the kisans could not be broken and the Congress was forced to introduce the Bill for Imposition of Ceilings on Land-holdings on 20 August 1959 which became an Act in 1960.[130] Many kisans were granted ownership rights over the land. They believed that India gained Independence in the 1960s, when they were granted ownership rights over the land—they were free at last. However the *Shikmi* or landless labourers were still without any rights and their struggle for *sirdari* rights rages on.

To conclude, the politics of the Congress in the years after Independence actively sought to consign the aspirations of the kisans to the mortuary of history. However, the kisans movements gained in ferocity and resilience, and Zamindari abolition was finally achieved through legislation. The character of the Congress government was unmasked by the loopholes in the Act which facilitated the triumph of zamindari. The kisans' position worsened because in addition to the

[128]Appendix V.

[129]Paul R. Brass, Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh (Berkeley, 1965), pp. 25–27.

[130]Interview with Vijaypal Chamar, Chatera village, Shorhatgarh, 9 February 1992.

big zamindars (who were able to get away), there were a host of middle-men appointed by the Congress government who were motivated by personal gain. It took years of sustained protest by the kisans members who were either Communists, Socialists or members of the KMPP party to enforce legislation. Finally *Chakbandi* was introduced and the kisans were promised plots close to where they lived.

In these movements of the disinherited, the kisans demonstrated that although there were different levels of political participation (of which they were clearly in the majority), there was an abiding abyss between *élite* and subaltern politics. Popular politics generated its own traditions and had an autonomous political agenda which was opposed to bourgeois nationalism. The Congress was unwilling to concede to the pressure from below, but was compelled to change its attitude. The Zamindari Abolition Bill was followed by the Consolidation of Land Holdings Act of 1961 and a ten-acre ceiling was imposed on land ownership illustrating how popular politics was decisively able to transform government policy even if was done bit by bit. As the third Five Year Plan began, the promise of a socialist democracy was set into motion.[131] The Congress was forced to make concessions and participate in meeting the main demands of the kisans.

[131]For example the government gave a Rs 7,772,300 grant to Deoria; loans and public works appeared high in the list of priorities by the late 1950s.*Aaj*, 9 September 1960.

Conclusion

> A popular culture is always "open"; its national genius, as peculiar as it may be, utilises ecumenical expressions which go very far in space and rather deeply in time. For such reasons we can also say that popular culture is "beyond history": not in the sense that it lacks its own "history", but because this history consists above all in the revaluation of an extremely archaic heredity, coming from prehistoric times, in an unceasing discovery altogether, and in a reinterpretation of the values of primordial spirituality.[1]

The main aim of this study has been to examine popular politics with particular reference to kisans' notions of social justice *vis-à-vis* their experience of *julum* in eastern U.P., and to understand how this governed the growth of *chetna* (political awakening) among them. What is meant by the term "popular politics" or the culture and politics of the kisans? To what extent was it informed by, or remained autonomous of, the nationalist ideology of the Congress? How did the kisans measure the outcome against their expectations? Finally, given the wider political context, how are the parameters, vocabulary, and political content of subaltern protest to be judged?

[1]Mircea Popescu, "Eliade and Folklore", in Joseph M. Kitagawa and Charles H. Long (eds.), Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honour of Mircea Eliade (Chicago, 1969), p. 84.

Before analysing these questions it is necessary to examine the cultural biases in the politics of representation—who speaks for whom and in what contexts. There is a need to recognise that official versions of the environment, social structure and even time were never totally accepted or understood by the kisans; nor could such representations completely control their subordination. To them freedom and salvation also meant an escape from the values of a society which had disregarded the indigenous way of life and transformed their landscape and vital natural resources. The kisans reacted to the region as a habitat of the resulting culture; the metaphors frequently used by them with regard to the environment, local agricultural and social practices, gender, caste and cosmology reflected local ways of knowing. These differences between the official and popular are not just differences as in distinction, but rather differences emanating from hierarchies of power that influenced the political perspective, identity and forms of expression of classes within society.

This was also indicated by the various terms of reference that the kisans drew upon to construct their ideas of reality: the kisans negotiated their own space which encouraged resistance and validated self-worth. For instance, it is vital to take into account the influence their values held for them because they frequently projected images of the cosmic order on to the plane of human existence. Further, the kisans' notions of time and space were in a sense "beyond history", rooted in a cosmology which had a pre-eminent ontological status in the cultural heritage. This gave an important dimension to their politics. When they sought a reversal of the existing order and articulated the need to establish a new society and a world of their own, it was frequently beyond history, beyond reality and beyond the necessity of fighting to bring about change and social justice.

Whatever the culture, human experience is made up of sequences of events and activities such as working, thinking, nurturing, eating, sleeping, reproducing, maturing, suffering and death. However, attitudes towards nature, time, space and gender vary according to different cultures. One cannot merely impose modern western categories of knowledge—and hence also ways of knowing, understanding and measuring time and space—as the kisans' interpretation of historical time. While these social and moral codes induced their own cultural inertia, they also guided the choice and interpretation of events with respect to cognition, memory and history. For example, what is regarded as mysticism and the occult were very much part of the cultural norms and validated social production. The kisans often spoke to me of the natural world by frequent reference to divinity and supernatural forces. Their source of vitality was derived from a powerful tradition of nature-worship with goddesses and gods, both intellectual and physical, not just immortal beings with ethical attributes. All these beliefs informed popular consciousness and had a distinct impact on their reading of politics. To repeat, the philosophical underpinnings of popular politics drew as much from the underlying spiritual tradition as they did from the turmoils arising from the land problem and the struggle for survival.

It has been shown how the kisans believed in the power of *tyaag* or sacrifice, when something of value was given up it was usually done in the expected hope of greater gain. There was an ingrained belief in the affirmation of an on-going relationship between the givers and receivers of sacrifice in the cultural tradition. It was indicated by the use and practice of its rich vocabulary relating to the subjective and psychic states, the functions and phenomena *bhakti, dharma, punya, maya, mukti* and *karma*. These beliefs cannot be systematised and culturally

revealed themselves through the common sayings and behaviour of the kisans. It is impossible to give an account of them without abstracting them from reality and constructing a system which has no counterpart in it. These values were present in their politicisation, and the *kangresiya* came to be regarded as such an ideal.

Added to these world views was the spirit of millenarianism. It has been noted that the belief in the millennium has found support at all levels in society, at one time or another, but it is particularly among those who believe themselves to be oppressed, that the "longing for deliverance" has caused tremendous exultation: to them, Gandhi had renounced wordly pleasures and was capable of bringing the supernatural powers of the sacred world into the everyday human world, which could correct everything which was going wrong. Despite failures, disappointments (and what the kisans could not see as betrayals), millenarianism expressed an integral stream of popular politics which characterised the early phase of kisan agitation, roughly during the early 1920s. One of the obvious advantages was its integrational role, wielding various strata, such as the lower-castes, enabling them to overcome segregation and social taboos, thus giving them a public platform to express their political interests.

The Non-Cooperation Movement under Gandhi certainly provided the immediate impetus for the political participation of the kisans. But their politicisation followed a very different path from the one laid down by the diktats of the Congress. To them, although the *Kangres* was primarily a movement to establish a new world order, *"naike duniya ka basol"* symbolising ultimately collective this-worldly salvation, they were selective in their support for it. For example, the kisans actively participated in subverting official symbols of power—Chauri

Chaura epitomised the popular understanding of *swaraj* but they remained indifferent to the Constructive Programme especially with regard to the spinning and weaving of *khadi*, although initially they had espoused "Gandhian morality" by enforcing new moral codes such as the ban on alcohol, drugs, fish, meat and gambling. Similarly, the boycott of all government institutions such as schools, courts, government service was not as meaningful to the kisans as agrarian reforms were. They enthusiasticaly refused to pay rent or perform *hari, begar* and *nazarana*—for this constituted *swaraj*. The material conditions of their lives made it impossible for them to identify with or comprehend the political solutions offered by the nationalism of the Congress.

What were the immediate demands and expectations of the kisans? They were fighting for a dignity of existence that had for so long been denied to them. Agriculture was the main source of their livelihood; they worked from dawn to dusk and drew their strength from the soil. To them, the ownership and control of the land and livestock was their sole definition of security. Their attitudes stemmed from peculiarities of the agrarian structure in eastern U.P. which Shahid Amin has characterised as "petty peasant production": the acute scarcity of land, very small-holdings, low fertility of the soil, high density of population, low cash income and perpetual indebtedness weighed heavily upon their lives.[2]. The oppressive laws and arbitary rents made even subsistence virtually impossible and was a recurring dilemma. Added to these constraints were natural calamities such as the floods. The kisans were aware of their low bargaining power and lack of control over the immediate circumstances of life, and they were critical and deeply

[2]Shahid Amin , "Small peasant commodity production and rural indebtedness: The culture of sugarcane in U.P. c 1880–1920" in Ranajit Guha (ed.) Subaltern Studies, I, (Delhi, 1982), pp. 39–87

resentful of such authority: to them zamindari *julum* was the most intolerable form of oppression.

Thus, the kisans imposed these concomitant hopes and expectations upon their *netas*, who in turn were able to reflect their political hopes, ethics and judgements upon the Congress by radicalising the party. They were the image-bearers who helped to channel and mould the message of hope. They potrayed the collective consciouness of the kisans for a new world which drew upon the complexity of culture: the context and shared experience was particularly important in the shaping of political values. These anti-authoritarian and left-wing attitudes began to be expressed not only in the form of organised political resistance but also through the rejection of the ideology of the rulers. Low-caste reform movements, and the removal of untouchability during the 1930s was one consequence of popular protest, a recognition of their autonomous, political identity that could prove threatening.

The *netas* were also able to build upon the emotional resonances which these associations carried by manipulating expectations and beliefs. The demand for land ownership remained central to the struggle. It was not enough merely to draw upon popular associations with the environment, myths, legends, folklore, music and customs to keep the kisans interested, it had to have a contemporary purpose. Their politics reached into these subterranean streams which had fed from different pools. The kisans realised their identities not simply within the nationalist discourse but as much against it. In various localities, *chutki, muthia* and *karkhani* were frequent sources of grain collection, independently organised by the *kartas* for raising funds for the movements; most of these grain supplies were used to feed the Congress and later Communist *kartas* who had come to

their assistance.

Although women in various kisan households were in the forefront of such activities, gender inequality was not an issue that was seriously addressed. The presence of a large number of women in these movements had been integral in defining popular politics, nonetheless their claims to land were seen to be represented adequately by the men: women's individual rights in land were not discussed and their interests were subsumed within the concerns of their households.[3] These struggles tended to utilise traditional orientations so long as they did not conflict with its major priorities, so that the nature of gender inequalities in the organisational set-up of these movements, or in the intra-family relations of the members of these movements remained unquestioned.[4] Politics merely took the shape of the prevailing gender relations. The women said they united with the men because it was a common struggle against zamindari *julum*; this did not mean that the women were complicit in perpetuating their own oppression. Rather it suggests that the position of women remained an uncontested issue until the 1970s because gender was not the object of the struggles against *julum*. The main ideological thrust of these struggles was against zamindari tyranny; they demanded land to the tiller in a social system where men's rights were privileged over women's rights. So popular politics made no change to the existing system of gender relations.

However, in general, popular politics reversed the kisans' feelings of symbolic and material marginality within society: they believed that they were capable of (applying power towards) changing the world. This growth of fearlessness was

[3]Bina Agarwal, "Gender, resistance and land: interlinked struggles on resources and meanings in south Asia", Journal of Peasant Studies, 2, 1, 1994, pp. 81–125.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 99.

perceived as a serious threat to the old order. The physical emergence of several kisan *jathas* was like a tidal wave, and the kisans realised the power of *sangathan.* The ferocious tone of these movements in eastern U.P. was also encouraged by leaders thrown up from its ranks who challenged the oppressive limits of the established order. The kisan question sought to transform the social order not at the margins but at its very centre, which it did. The former referents of caste, religion, locality, generation were transformed. What had begun simply as struggles against *hari, begari*, *nazarana* and *bedakhli* turned against zamindari itself and called for its abolition, thus attacking one of the mainstays of the colonial administration. It became the central issue that attracted widespread kisan support in the movements against *julum* from the late 1930s and continued to empower these movements until the Zamindari Abolition Bill was passed on 1 July 1952. The promise to embark on radical agrarian reform sustained the kisans' support of the Congress. The *volte face* led to serious conflicts and rifts within the party forcing ideological choices between Nationalism, Gandhian Socialism and Communism.

Historians working on U.P., such as Kapil Kumar, note how the right wing in the Congress deliberately restrained the peasantry by refusing them Congress membership forms particularly where a large number of zamindars' *amalas* (agents) enrolled as *kartas.*[5] Further he states that the constituencies were divided during the elections in 1937 to marginalise pro-peasant voters. It is not suprising that many prominent members of the U.P. DCCs came from petty zamindari backgrounds and zamindari abolition was the last thing they wanted. Take, for example, the composition of the DCC members in Basti which consisted of a significant number of small zamindars as its members. They were primarily

[5]Kapil Kumar, "Pesants, Congress and the struggle for freedom 1917–1939" in Kapil Kumar (ed.), Congress and Classes: Nationalism, Workers and Peasants (Delhi, 1988), p. 252.

Kayasth, Brahmin and Kshatriya; some were local *mukhtars* such as Krishna Sharma, Rajaram Sastri, Balbadrinath, Indrasen Singh, Ram Daman Singh and Ram Shankar Lal. In contrast, the *mandal* Congress committees included many members from the lower-castes and they were primarily kisans. The radicalism of the *kangresiya* came from these ranks. The DCCs were entirely dependent on these activists—*kartas* and *netas* who commanded the loyalty of the kisans. From time to time they intervened, but the MCCs functioned independently. For instance, the DCC advocated the the implementation of the Constructive Programme, while the MCC were more interested in solving local tensions dealing with land, also assisting in subverting oppressive values which had been an integral part of the old social order.

At another level, the creation by the colonial government of a social and physical landscape in its own image and for its own requirements disturbed them. They frequently complained about the rents and low output of the soil to their *netas*. The zamindars' rents, decisions of the courts, the brutality of the the police and the administration symbolised oppressive structures to them. They interpreted *julum* to refer visibly and tangibly to the exercise of such violent physical force, and also to what could not be so obviously defined: it conflicted with their fundamental right to dignity. Thus, these movements against *julum* were also drawn from a powerful urge to transform and reverse what constituted the official version of reality. The kisans longed for a just and peaceful social order where there would be an end to the poverty, hunger, disease, and all forms of injustice inflicted by man; to them this was symbolised by *Ram rajya*, a world of bountiful goods for all, harmony and peace. Doubtless, the ideology of nationalism was widely propagated. During the 1930s and particularly in 1942, the kisans interpreted its

message in their own terms by confronting figures and institutions of authority such as the thana, post office, *patwari* and zamindar. These movements were also directed against the mighty power structure of the raj and later the Congress. The kisans saw them as being directed against *julum*, their immediate source of torment.

The "culture of terror" under colonial rule—*chowkidar, patwari, daroga, amin, pandit* and *mullah*—continued under the Congress. The increasing severity of political repression is an indicator of the intentions of the new administration. There were innumerable tales of torture and even pregnant women were not spared. Nothing had changed: to the kisans, their *swaraj* had still to come. This was why after independence in 1947, many Congressmen and women resigned from the party. Most of the resignations were from the MCC whose members joined the Samajwadi party and the Communist Party. The Socialists had severed ties with the Congress and the RSPI-Communist alliance was strengthened. So pockets of resistance were built in the countryside which were distinctly Socialist or Communist.

The Congress was widely discredited. The kisans learned about tactics and differences—and support for the Communist Party grew because it promised not to compromise them. The kisans were taught to perceive their long drawn out struggle as a "struggle of memory against forgetting", for instance, Kangres party jhooti hai bhulo math bhulo math.[6] The Communists also advocated immediate seizure of government and zamindari abolition by armed struggle if necessary. They were able to achieve quick results in the short term. In contrast, the Socialists were advocating Gandhian modes of *satyagraha*; they behaved very much like

[6] "The Congress party is false. Do not forget, do not forget".

the pre-Independence Congress, so they were not as effective in pressurising the authorities. But from the late 1940s up to the 1950s, the Communists threatened seriously to uproot the Congress government.

Until the 1940s, the kisans remained aloof from communal politics in eastern U.P. Many *netas* believed that although the zamindars actively fostered a religious divide to dissipate the kisan movements, they were not entirely successful. The Communists had taken up the issue just before Partition and educated the kisans. Many kisans believed that it was more important to solve the pressing problems of livelihood and staying alive was hard anyway. They said it was not for them to decide who God was or where this God was to be found: everything was endowed with divinity and certainly everyone had God in them. Most leaders said it was natural when two parties resided as close neighbours, inconvenient questions arose between them as they very often did in a family. Further, various shades of meanings might be attached to local tensions (and were often attached to all those things elsewhere) by people who neither belonged to one community or the other.

However, despite so many impressive achievements and such tremendous mass support why was *kisan raj* to prove such an elusive dream? The main supporters of kisan raj were the Socialists, RSP, KMPP, the Forward Bloc and the Communists. Each of them was instrumental in projecting kisan raj as its fundamental political and social goal. They emphasised the need for an armed struggle to overthrow the state and the establish a *kisan-mazdoor* raj. The cult of the *lathi* was openly propagated by them, although the Socialists were reluctant to champion such methods. These left-wing parties did not unite and operated in separate, isolated pockets. Moreover the Socialists and the KMPP criticised the Communists

(and vice-versa) making it easier for the Congress to continue in office. These kisan movements could not be welded together and remained scattered and easy to control through a few armed police.

The *satyagrahas* launched by the Socialists aimed to follow the Gandhian pattern of non-violence and continued for nearly fifteen years after Independence. However in areas where the other parties operated, kisan radicalism forced the issue of revolution by violence. The Communists, for example, had been extremely successful in the trans-Rapti, Shorhatgarh in particular. However, the local leaders who were living and working among the kisans felt they had been betrayed by the Communist Politiburo.[7] They believed that this was one of the main reasons for the failure of kisan raj.

They felt that the attitude of the higher echelons of the Communist leadership towards its cadres was sometimes patronising, disrespectful and often displayed an indifference to their individual achievements.[8] The Party line seriously compromised the interests of the kisans. The leaders never consulted the local *netas* who had been responsible for organising these movements for over twenty years. For example, these sharp differences between the official party line and local Communist activities in Basti came into the open in April-May 1948. The regional representatives secretly met the member of the Communist Politburo, Comrade Kumar Mishra who advocated *lagan bandi* (no-rent campaign) as an immediate, organised, direct attack on the administration;[9] Sheetal Tripathi, a prominent local leader opposed the motion, because he believed like his comrades, that more time was required to organise the kisans who would otherwise suffer

[7]Interview with Prakash Chandra Pandey, Basti, 24 December 1991, and his book Mangal Sootra (Lucknow, 1986.), p. 240.
[8]Interview with Prakash Chandra Pandey, Basti, 26 December 1991.
[9]*Idem.*

severe reprisal; the kisans were insufficiently organised and defenceless, and their physical and economic security was at risk. Instead of listening to his suggestions, disciplinary action was taken against him on charges of insubordination, because he, a mere peasant dared oppose the party line as advocated by a Politburo member. Tripathi was sent to the city and another important dissenter, Prakash Chandra Pandey was sent to Gaighat. They were forbidden to meet any colleagues and were discredited among their fellow comrades. The kisans were quite demoralised by these developments and the entire campaign proved abortive. Arvind Das's research on Bihar for the later period reveals a similar political pattern. He notes that the left parties "ceremonially sponsored" the kisan movements transforming them from a violent attack of the peasantry to becoming "a merely symbolic opposition".[10] The left wing also helped to expose it prematurely to official violence and thus indirectly helped to crush it.

These developments reinforce the view put forward by Ranajit Guha about the extraordinary disjuncture between the two independent streams—the *élite* and the popular in the Indian national movement, which did not merge with each other.[11] The grassroots radicalism of the kisans aimed for *kisan raj* was naturally opposed by the bourgeois nationalism of the Congress. The party had forged a multi-class alliance which became a battlefield between contesting and conflicting class interests. The main question was who was ultimately going to steer the Congress and determine its agenda. Despite the widespread, acute shortage of food and deaths by starvation, the legislators in independent India were slow in providing relief. They were more interested in acquiring compensation for the

[10]Arvind N. Das, "Agrarian change from above and below: Bihar 1947–78" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies,II, (Delhi, 1983), pp. 213–15.

[11]R. Guha, 'On some aspects of the historiography in colonial India", in R. Guha (ed.),Subaltern Studies, I, (Delhi, 1981), pp. 1–8.

zamindars. So the Congress after Independence lost its mystique in the eastern districts.

Thus neither the Congress nor the ideology of nationalism can be regarded as monolithic or homogenous processes: popular politics had distinctly independent political claims. Nor was the nature of politics on the subcontinent primarily informed by factional struggle, communal and caste conflict (within the various arenas of political life), with correlative patterns at the national, provincial and local levels, as some historians are inclined to suggest.[12] Rather it was a series of confronations between bourgeois nationalism of the Congress and the popular demand for kisan raj. The severity of the class conflict between the zamindars and the kisans threatened to unseat Congress raj after 1947. The local *netas* and *kartas* who had done so much for these struggles to succeed were the sacrificial lambs: there was no room at the top for them and their interests were undermined time and again. Inspite of repeated demoralisation, the pressure from below forced the Congress administration to take notice: popular politics had its own inner life that was remarkably resilient to attempts by the *élite* to constrain and defuse it.

Each of these movements diverged from each other, although they were part of widespread, often scattered, organised struggles for land rights that lasted from the late 1920s up to the 1960s. The kisans recognised the continuity in these struggles and drew inspiration from it. They believed *swaraj* happened when the allotments of fields were made in their name. Until then they were unable to distinguish between zamindari *julum* and Congress *julum*. Clearly it was not the ideology of the Congress in itself or Gandhism that mobilised the kisans. All the

[12]For a classic example, J. Gallagher, G. Johnson and A. Seal (eds.), Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870–1940, (Cambridge, 1973).

kisan movements against *julum* demonstrated that they were not passive victims of "false consciousness", but fully capable not just of penetrating the self-serving claims of the Congress, but also manipulating, undermining, overthrowing and influencing elements of domination.

सत्याग्रह [illegible] आवेदन पत्र

श्री मन्त्री

.....सुपौल सत्याग्रह कमेटी

जिला कमेटी .....

महाशय,

कृपया मेरा नाम सत्याग्रहियों के रजिस्टर में दर्ज करिये।

१—मैं काँग्रेस के पूर्ण स्वराज्य (पूर्ण स्वाधीनता) के उद्देश्य को स्वीकार करता हूं और लोकतंत्र के सिद्धान्त में तथा भारतवर्ष की एकता और अखण्डता में विश्वास करता हूं।

२—जब तक मैं सत्याग्रही रहूँगा सदा कर्म और वचन में अहिंसात्मक रहूंगा और अभिप्राय में भी अहिंसात्मक रहने की उत्सुकता के साथ चेष्टा करूंगा क्योंकि मेरा विश्वास है कि भारतवर्ष की वर्तमान अवस्था में अहिंसा ही पूर्ण स्वराज्य की प्राप्ति में तथा भारत में बसने वाली सभी जातियों और सम्प्रदायों में एकता स्थापित करने में सहायक हो सकता है और हमारे इन उद्देश्यों को पूरा करा सकती है।

३—मैं अस्पृश्यता की बुराई को दूर करने के औचित्य और आवश्यकता में विश्वास करता हूं और जब २ मुमकिन होगा दलित वर्गों के साथ व्यक्तिगत संपर्क स्थापित करने और उनकी सेवा करने का प्रयत्न करूंगा।

४—मैं भारत की मुक्ति के लिए स्वदेशी को आवश्यक समझता हूं और हाथ से कते हाथ के बुने खद्दर का व्यवहार करूंगा और दूसरे किस्म के कपड़े से परहेज करूंगा, जहां तक सम्भव होगा मैं घरेलू उद्योग-धन्धों की तैयारी की हुई वस्तुओं का व्यवहार करूँगा।

५—मैं ऊपर की काँग्रेस कमेटी, वर्किंग कमेटी या कांग्रेस द्वारा स्थापित दूसरी एजन्सी के आदेशों को पालन करूंगा।

६—मैं नियम पूर्वक सूत कातूंगा।

७—कांग्रेस की ओर से जो सेवा मेरे सुपुर्द होगी उसे इच्छा से पूरा करूंगा और बिना किसी किस्म के नाराजगी के सदा कष्ट उठाने और त्याग करने के लिए तैयार रहूंगा।

८—जेल जाने की अवस्था में मैं अपने या अपने घर वालों या आश्रितों के लिए कांग्रेस से किसी प्रकार की आर्थिक सहायता नहीं चाहूंगा।

हस्ताक्षर या निशानी अंगूठा [illegible]

पूरा पता [illegible]

ता० दरखास्त देने की [illegible]

[illegible] का हस्ताक्षर

342

Appendix I

Congress Pamphlet, 1930.

The Call for Satyagraha

Honourable Member,

Please record my name in the Satyagraha register.

1. I agree with the Congress demands for Purna Swaraj and in the principles of Democracy, I have confidence in the unity and integrity of India.

2. As long as I am a *satyagrahi*, I will do my duty and keep my word by following a non-violent path of action even in the face of repression. I firmly believe that on account of India's diversity, Purna Swaraj can be achieved by non-violence alone; it would establish unity among the people belonging to all castes and classes and achieve these goals.

3. I will endeavour to remove the evils of untouchability and do all that is necessary; when the moment is right I will work with the oppressed classes and assist in their social upliftment.

4. I believe that swadeshi is vital for India's freedom and with enthusiasm I will wear spun Khadi. I will destroy all other kinds of cloth; wherever possible I will contribute to cottage industry.

5.I will follow the directives of the higher levels of the Congress, the working committee, and the other agencies established by the Congress.

6. I will always speak the truth.

7. I will assist the Congress in every possible way and I am unconditionally prepared to undertake every kind of hardship, and sacrifice on its behalf.

8. On being arrested, my household, associates or I will not seek any material

assistance from the Congress.

Signature or thumbprint:

Complete address:

Date:

Vijay press, Pucca bazaar, Basti. This pamphlet was published by the District Congress Committee in Basti in March 1930.

Appendix II

Source: Evidence from the Judgement of the Sessions Trial 63 of 1951, District court, Basti. Those who were arrested on 23 February 1951 in Bansi *tahsil* are listed below:

1. Ram Muhammed Singh, age 30, s/o Acchaibar Singh, resident of Dhawai.
2. Gomti Kurmi, age 23, s/o Haripal Kurmi, resident of Dhawai.
3. Lullur Bari, age 28, s/o Jhinku, resident of Karmaihia.
4. Pateshwari Singh, age 30, s/o Suraj Bux Singh, resident of Kopa.
5. Makkan Singh, age 20, s/o Daljit Singh, resident of Dhawai.
6. Bansi Chamar, age 20, s/o Badal, resident of Dhawai.
7. Lahuri Chamar, age 50, s/o Nohar, resident of Ukda.
8. Sher Bahadur Alias Biduli Singh, age 24, s/o Raghupat, resident of Dhawai.
9. Naresh Chamar, age 32, s/o Sukhai, resident of Dhawai.
10. Balakdas Chamar, age 45, s/o Autar Das. resident of Dhawai.
11. Makkhu Chai, age 32, s/o Baley Chai, resident of Dhawai.
12. Churaman Brahman, age 50, s/o Jokhu, resident of Dhawai.
13. Bhular Bhoj, age 32, s/o Jokhu, resident of Karamaihia
14. Sita Ram Kacchar, age 32, s/o Matai, resident of Piprahia.
15. Noore alias Samujh Chamar, age 62, s/o Gokul, resident of Dhawai.
16. Lalta Chamar, age 25, s/o Tokhu, resident of Dhawai.
17. Budhai Ahir, age 36, s/o Adhin Ahir, resident of Dhawai.
18. Manohri Chamar, age 60, s/o Gokul, resident of Dhawai.
19. Sarjoo Chamar, age 32, s/o Samujh, resident of Dhawai.
20. Pandohi Chamar, age 35, s/o Samujh, resident of Dhawai.
21. Ghirau Chamar, age 24, s/o Samujh, resident of Dhawai.

22. Neebar Chamar, age 40,s/o Soman, resident of Dhawai.
23. Gayadin Chamar, age 28,s/o Munnu, resident of Dhawai.
24. Lalta Teli, age 38, s/o Autar, resident of Dhawai.
25. Kalicharan Kurmi, age 32, s/o Naipal, resident of Dhawai.
26. Sheetal Chamar, age 25, s/o Ori, resident of Dhawai.
27. Bucchan Tewari, age 28, s/o Ram Harakh, resident of Dhawai.
28. Rameshwari Chai, age 35, s/o Soman, resident of Dhawai.
29. Jhinnu Tewari, age 24, s/o Ram Harakh, resident of Dhawai.
30. Jaganath Kurmi, age 50, s/o Gobhardan, resident of Dhawai.
31. Sukhlal Chai, age 60, s/o Mani, resident of Dhawai.
32. Bhagwati alias Bhuilotan singh, age 45, s/o Daljit Singh, resident of Dhawai.
33. Ram Sabad Brahman, age 21, s/o Haripal, resident of Dhawai.
34. Molhu Chamar, age 21, s/o Teenmal, resident of Ukda.
35. Sundar Barhai, age 33, s/o Andhi, resident of Dhawai.
36. Sundar Bhar, age 25, s/o Autar, resident of Dhawai.
37. Baley Ahir, age 40, s/o Kurkut, resident of Dhawai.
38. Asharfi Kacchar, age 20, s/o Matai, resident of Dhawai.
39. Baley Chai, age 22, s/o Budhu, resident of Dhawai.

नेहरू सरकार की अल्पमतों संबंधी नीति का जनाजा

सम्पूर्णानन्द के लाडले

सर्किल इन्सपेक्टर की नादिरशाही

नेहरू सरकारका दावा है कि उसने अल्पमतोंके **धार्मिक, आर्थिक, सामाजिक, सभ्यता व संस्कृति संबंधी** अधिकारों की रक्षा की गारन्टी दी है। मगर अमल में जिस तरह देश की जनता के हर वर्ग के अधिकारों पर चोटें करके इस सरकार ने गद्दारी की है ठीक उसी तरह अल्पमतों के हकों पर आये दिन हमले हो रहे हैं जिसकी वजह से हमारे मुसलमान भाई जो हमारी खेती, कारखानों और सांस्कृतिक जीवन के हर पहलू में हमारे जीवन साथी हैं हजारों की संख्या में पाकिस्तान चले जा रहे हैं।

पिछले महीनों में अकेले मेहदावल से हमारे सैकड़ों बुनकर भाई पाकिस्तान जा चुके हैं। कुछ माह पहिले कांग्रेसी लीडर मीर मासिद अली और कबीर बाबा के मगहर के सैकड़ों मुसलमान भाइयों को सर्किल इन्सपेक्टर राममूर्ति सिंह ने कहा था कि—"तुम लोग अब चोटियां रखा करो ही हिन्दोस्तान में रह सकते हो वरना पाकिस्तान चले जाओ" और कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी के लगातार आन्दोलन तीन माह चलाने पर ही उस पर मामूली सी कार्रवाई सरकार ने की।

मगहर की घटनाओं के कुछ माह गुजरे होंगे कि १९ अगस्त सन् १९५४ को कस्बा शोहरतगढ़ के ५० मुसलमान भाइयों ने एक दरख्वास्त द्वारा यह खबर दी कि १८-८-५४ को ९ बजे रात में "सर्किल इन्सपेक्टर रामानन्द राय पुलिस तथा गुन्डों की मदद से मसजिद घेरवा लिए और मसजिद का सारा सामान लूट लिया और २८ आदमियों को गिरफ्तार किया जिसमें अधिकतर नमाज पढ़ रहे थे। ५००) नकद, २ बोरा चावल, नमाज में बिछाई जाने वाली ३००) की दरी मसजिद का ताला तोड़ कर ले लिया गया और कुरान व हदीस फाड़े गए। मास्टर साहब का सारा सामान बर्बाद का डाला....." २०-८-५४ को शोहरतगढ़ में लोगों ने बतलाया कि १७ और १८ अगस्त की दोनों रातों में जनसंघ के जलूस के साथ पुलिस का कोई विशेष प्रबन्ध न था—यह जनसंघ जिसके आदमियों ने गांधी जी की हत्या की और सिर से पैर तक साम्प्रदायिक है—और सर्किल इन्सपेक्टर पुलिस तथा गुन्डों को लेकर जूता पहिने मसजिद में घुस गया जहां बर्तन तोड़े गये और बर्तनों में पेशाब किया गया।" मैं

(उलट दीजिए)

१९-८-५४ की रात की गाड़ी से शोहरतगढ़ हालात की जांच के लिए पहुंचा तो स्टेशन पर देखा जनसंघ के लगभग एक दर्जन आदमी बड़ी लाठियों के साथ घूम रहे थे और पुलिस का कहीं पता न था। वहां सूबाई खुफिया विभाग के ए० जी० ओ० तथा दो सिपाही मौजूद थे जिनमें से एक के हाथ में लम्बी लाठी थी। लोगों ने मुझे यह भी बतलाया कि सर्किल इन्सपेक्टर ने मुसलमान भाइयों से कहा "तुम लोग मुट्ठी भर हो पीस दिए जाओगे।"

इन घटनाओं के बाद का **का० भारतेन्दुराय**, एम० एल० ए० **का० शीतल** मन्त्री जि० कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी तथा का० **द्वारिकासिंह** २०-८-५४ को लखनऊ में सम्पूर्णानन्द से मिले और उन्हें स्थिति का ज्ञान कराया। हाकिम परगना तथा गारद भी २०-८-५४ की रात में शोहरतगढ़ पहुंच गए मगर आज भी हालत यह है कि कई दर्जियों की दूकानें जबर्दस्ती बाजार से हटाई जा रही हैं और अल्पमतों पर दबाव नीति पर अमल किया जा रहा है। दो मुसलिम कांसटेबुलों को लाइन हाजिर किया गया और इस प्रकार नौकरियों में जो अल्पमतों के साथ अन्याय की नीति है उस पर अमल किया गया।

इन तमाम घटनाओं से यह साफ जाहिर है कि पुलिस अफसरशाही अपनी गन्दी साजिशों से हिन्दू मुसलमानों में शक व शुबहा का वातावरण पैदा करके एक ओर इस जन-विरोधी सरकार की जिन्दगी बढ़ाना और दूसरी ओर अपनी जेब गर्म करने का सामान कर रही थी।

हिन्दू मुसलमान में भेदभाव करके राज करने की नीति अंगरेज की थी व अब कांग्रेस सरकार को वही विरासत में मिली है।

कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी जनताको १८५७ की हिन्दू-मुसलिम एका की परम्पराओं की और विशेषरूप से शोहरतगढ़ की जनता को उन तमाम परम्पराओं की याद दिलाना चाहती है जिसके मातहत वहां के हिन्दू-मुसलमानों ने मिल कर राजा शोहरतगढ़ और शेख चेतरा जैसे जालिम जमींदारों के अत्याचारों के विरुद्ध लड़कर बहुत सी कामयाबियां हासिल की हैं। हिन्दू-मुसलमानों में फूट जन विरोधी शक्तियों का हथियार है जिससे वह जनता के जीवन को हर तरह से तबाह करते रहे हैं।

कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी जनता तथा जनवादी शक्तियों से अपील करती है कि वह अपनी जमीन, रोजी, आजादी, सभ्यता, संस्कृति व इज्जत की रक्षा के लिए मजबूत एका कायम करे और जनता के दुश्मनों की साजिशों को बेकार बनावें।

क्या सरकार उक्त सर्किल इन्सपेक्टर की इन घृणित हरकतों की खुली और निष्पक्ष जांच करके उचित कार्रवाई करेगी ?

प्रकाशचन्द्र पांडे, मेम्बर, सेक्रेटेरियट जि० क० **कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी बस्ती**

हिन्द प्रिन्टिङ्ग प्रेस, गोरखपुर।

Appendix III

Communist Party pamphlet, Basti, August 1954.

The Minority Policy of the Nehru Government, Sampurnanand's acolytes: The tyranny of the Police Inspector

The Nehru government declared that it would guarentee the protection of the religious, social and cultural integrity of the minorities. But the government has trampled upon the freedom of individual citizens and has done the same thing to the rights of the minorities. That is why our Muslim brothers who have been our comrades in agriculture, industry and cultural life are migrating in thousands to Pakistan. During the past few months, 100 weavers have immigrated from Mehendawal alone to Pakistan. A few months ago, in Maghar, two Congress leaders, Mir Majid Ali and Kabir Baba, complained that the Police Inspector Ramamurthy Singh ordered 100 Muslim brothers: "Grow a *choti* on your heads and you will be allowed to stay in Hindustan. Otherwise go to Pakistan". The Communist party took up the agitation against the Police Inspector.

A few months after the Maghar incident, on 19 August 1954, 40 Muslims of Kasba Taluq in Shorhatgarh petitioned that "on the 18 August at 9 p.m. a police Inspector Ramanand Rai actively assisted the looting of the moque with the help of a few hooligans and arrested 28 men who were praying. They took Rs. 500 in cash, two bags of rice, 300 prayer carpets and tore pages from the Quran. All the personal belongings of the Kazi were destroyed. The Jan Sangh held a procession on the 17 and 18 August and the police made no speci al arrangements to prevent trouble. They are reactionary men who killed Gandhiji and they entered the mosque, wearing footwear, with the assistance of the police

inspector and the hooligans. They urinated in the mosque."

I [author of the pamphlet] entered the mosque to inspect the site on the night of 19 August 1954 and found a dozen Jan Sangh men armed with *lathis*. Among them was an assistant government officer and two sepoys who were armed with *lathis*.The people told me that the circle inspector had threatened our Muslim brothers, "You are only a handful and you will be crushed".

After these incidents, Comrade Jharkande Rai, MLA, Comrade Sheetal, minister of the Communist party and Comrade Dwarika Singh met Sampurnanand in Lucknow on 20 August 1954 in Lucknow and apprised him of the situation. In Hakim *pargana*, some tailors' shops were forcibly removed from the market under coercion. Even two constables, who were government servants were not spared because they were Muslim. It is clear from all these events that the gross misconduct of the police in dividing the Muslims and the Hindus by fostering doubt and suspicion is keeping the anti-people's government [Congress] in power, on the one hand, and on the other enriching themselves at the cost of ordinary people.

Divide and Rule was introduced by the British and it is being done by the Congress. The Communist party want to stress the unity between the Muslims and the Hindus, the traditions of 1857 with special reference to Shorhatgarh, where Hindus and Muslims successfully united to fight against the Raja of Shorhatgarh, and the Sheikhs of Chatera's tyranny. The Communists appeal to the public to unite and safeguard their land, wages, freedom, culture and civilisation and annhilate the enemy which is working against them. Can the present government carry an impartial investigation into the allegations against the Circle inspector and take suitable action?

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❀ नगर बाजार में ❀

९ जून इतवार को ३ बजे दिन को

किसानो की विराट सभा

जिले के कम्युनिस्ट नेताओं का आगमन

भाइयों,

सूखा, बाढ़ और पत्थर--पाले की वजह से जिले के किसान पिछले पांच सालों से बुरी तरह से तबाह हो रहे हैं। इस साल रबी की फसल रुपये में लगभग चार आना पैदा हुई है और किसान निकट भविष्य की चिन्ता से परेशान हैं।

सरकार की तरफ से गल्ले के अभाव को रोकने और किसान को उचित सहायता पहुंचाने का कोई मुकम्मिल इन्तजाम नहीं है। इस पर भी किसानों से मालगुजारी निचोड़ ली गई।

दूसरी तरफ रकम लाने वाली एकमात्र फसल गन्ने की खेती ट्यूबवेल का पानी न मिलने के कारण बुरी तरह से मिट चुकी हैं।

इस सिलसिले में सरकार के पास अपनी मांगे रखने के लिये ९ जून को नगर बाजार में किसानों की एक सभा होगी।

यह सभा ऐसी तारीख को (अर्थात ९ जून को) होने का एक महत्व और भी है। आप को मालूम होगा की आज के सौ साल पहले १८५७ में ९ जून को नगर इलाके की जनता ने नगर के राजा की रहनुमाई में अंग्रेजों के खिलाफ विद्रोह का झन्डा गाड़ा था और आज़ादी की पहली जंग का ऐलान किया था।

हजारों की तादाद में आकर अपनी मांगे-गल्ले की दुकाने खोलने, मालगुजारी में छूट, गन्ने की फसल के नुकसान का मुआवजा आदि हासिल करने के लिये आवाज बुलन्द कीजिये।

निवेदकः—

शिवपलटन चौधरी, अगरदी चौधरी, मचल हरिजन,
भुलई सिंह, भुआली हरिजन। (कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी, नगर)

भारत प्रेस गांधी नगर बस्ती

Appendix IV

Communist party pamphlet, 1957.

Please Assemble at 3 'o' clock on Sunday, 8 June 1957 for a mammoth meeting of the kisans to greet the arrival of the Communist leaders.

Brothers, For the past five years, the famine, floods and hail has caused grief to the kisans, This year only a quarter of the Rabi crop has been successful and the kisans are deeply worried about the future. There is no help forthcoming from the government nor any concessions in taxation. The tube wells which are the main source of irrigation for the income generating sugarcane crop has dried up, thus the crop have been seriously damaged.

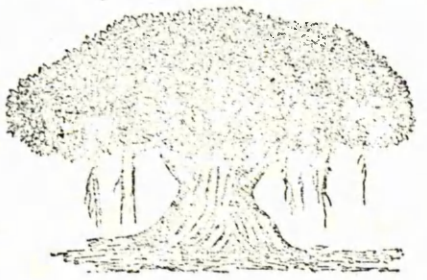
To press these demands to the government, on 9 June, the meeting of kisans is being held in nagar market. The meeting on the 9 June is also being held to commemorate the centenary of the first war of Independence held in this area exactly a hundred years ago in 1857.

Come in thousands, put forward our demands, reduction in transportation costs, the remission of taxes and so forth, and loudly proclaim "Inquilab Zindabad"

Yours sincerely Shiv Pattan Chaudhary, Agardi Choudhary, Machal Harijan, Bhuilai Singh, Bhusali Harijan of the Communist Party, Nagar, Basti

Printed by the Bharat Press, Gandhi Nagar, Basti

इन्कलाप जिन्दाबाद, सोशलिस्ट पार्टी जिन्दाबाद



काँग्रेस पार्टी पूंजीपतियों के साठ गांठ में किसान मजदूरों के जिन्दगी को दूबर बना रही है, गाढ़े कमाई से पैदा की गई ऊख दो पैसा सेर बिकवा रही है जब कि लकड़ी छः पैसा सेर बिकती है। टैक्सों तथा पंच वर्षीय योजनाओं से देश के सिर्फ पचास लाख बड़े लोगों का फायदा कर इन्हीं के चराई में भ्रष्ट बनकर शेष साढ़े बयालिस करोड़ जनता को मंहगाई गरीबी, बेकारी के चक्कर में परेशान कर भ्रष्टाचार का बढ़ावा कर रही है। अवसरवादी स्वतन्त्र जनसंघ वगैरह भी धनिक उच्च जातीय के लूट को बचाने के लिए बरसाती मेढक की तरह निकल पड़े हैं। किसान मजदूर तथा पिछड़ा वर्ग पहचान रहा है, इन सबों के पैसे के बल पर दौड़ने वाले किराये के टट्टू कार्यकर्ता सोशलिस्टों के मुकाबले न कामयाब हो जाँयगे, क्यों कि सोशलिस्ट पार्टी पीड़ित मानव समाज के नारकीय जीवन को सुखी बनाने के लिए वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम का भाव रखते हुये भाई भाई के इन्सानियत के संघर्ष में कुरबानी कर रही है।

अतः आप लोग सोशलिस्ट उम्मेदवार को अपना वोट बरगद के सामने मोहर लगा कर जिताइये ताकि शोषक युक्त धनिक उच्च वर्ग के शासन, लूट प्रभुत्व को खतम कर समाजवादी व्यवस्था द्वारा सबको सुखी बनाया जावे।

निवेदकः—
बंशराज--समाजवादी केन्द्र
बांसी-बस्ती।

शंकर प्रेस निकट बस स्टेशन बस्ती।

Appendix V

Socialist party pamphlet, 1958

Long Live Revolution—Long Live the Socialist party

It was the desire of Gandhiji, that, whether he be a labourer or a kisan, the wage earner will eat and the looter will be destroyed.

The Congress party is making the lives of the kisans and the mazdoors miserable as it s interests are tied with the capitalists. With laborious hardship, sugarcane is grown but its fixed to be sold at 2 paisa per seer, when even fuel is sold at 6 paisa per seer. Through its taxes and Five Year plans only 5,000,000 rich people benefit through such corruption at the cost of 475,000,000 people. The rise in prices and unemployment is giving impetus to corruption. The opportunists such as the Swatantara and the Jan Sangh parties are selling out the kisans' cause like toads which come out during the monsoons. They are looting the poor to assist the rich. The kisan, labourer and the backward class are now becoming aware that the hired donkeys who are in power on account of their money cannot be successful against the sincere hardworking Socialists. The Socialists are working towards removing all the hardships; to them the world is one family and they are ready to sacrifice themselves. Please vote for the Socialist candidate and thus end the exploitation of the capitalists by the establishment of a Socialist government.

Signed: Vanshraj, Samajwadi party office, Bansi tahsil, Basti.

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